Tai Peoples and Their Languages

A Preliminary Observation

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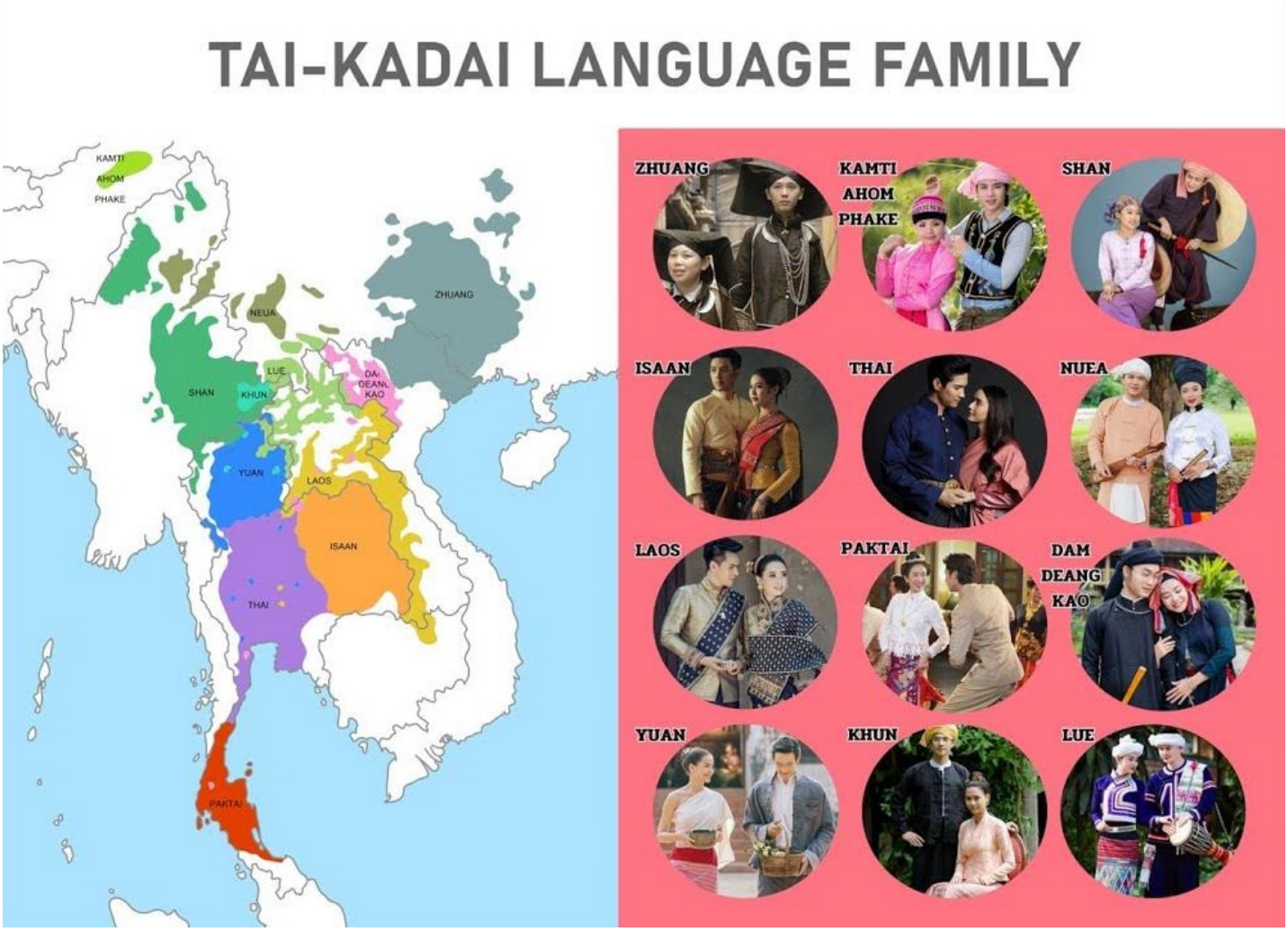

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจแนวคิดที่นักวิชาการในสมัยต่างๆ ได้ทำผลงานไว้เกี่ยวกับคนที่พูดภาษาตระกูลไทและภาษาตระกูลไท บทความนี้กล่าวถึงการกระจายตัวในทางภูมิศาสตร์ของภาษาตระกูลไททั้งในประเทศไทยและภายนอกประเทศไทย กล่าวถึงทฤษฎีต่างๆที่สำคัญ 5 ทฤษฎีที่วิเคราะห์ที่มาและสถานที่ต้นกำเนิดของภาษาตระกูลไท ความเกี่ยวพันของภาษาตระกูลไทกับภาษาตระกูลอื่น การแบ่งสาขาภายในภาษาตระกูลไท ลักษณะสำคัญของภาษาตระกูลไท วิวัฒนาการของภาษาไทยซึ่งเป็นภาษามาตรฐานของประเทศไทย

Tai and Thai and Siamese[1]

The Thai language family is the most widely spread language family in Southeast Asia. Thailand, Laos and the Shan State in Burma are all Tai states. There are Tai-speaking populations in Southern China (southwestern Yunnan, Kwangsi, Kweichow, and Kwangtung), in Eastern India (Assam), in Burma, North Vietnam, Cambodia, and the four Northern-most states of Malaysia. Altogether, speakers of the Tai language family number about 70 million, of which 58 million live in Thailand.

In order to distinguish the Thai who live in Thailand from the other Tai speaking peoples outside Thailand, linguists and anthropologists customarily use **Thai** (with h) to denote the Thai in Thailand and **Tai** (without h) to denote the Tai speaking peoples elsewhere. Older books called the Thai in Thailand **Siamese** as the older name for this country had been Siam until May 1949.

Geographical distribution of the Tai languages

As it has been said above, Tai speakers are the most widespread of Southeast Asian peoples. Their extent covers eight countries: China, India, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Malaysia, and goes from latitudes 7˚ to 26˚ N and from longitudes 94˚ to 110˚ E. Nevertheless, the Tai are remarkably homogeneous physically, culturally and linguistically. Anywhere the Tai make their homes, they appear as valley-dwelling, and wet-rice growers. Villages are located in river valleys or in pockets of level land in the low hills, always near water, and frequently in the midst of an orchard. Houses are constructed of wood and raised about eight feet above the ground on piles with slope gable roofs. Tai women are outgoing and active in economic production. Going eastward

[1]Discussion about the names of the language and the people can be read in scholarly journals in both Thai and European languages. To mention just a few, Chit Phumisak (1976: p.629) devoted a whole book to discussion of this subject; L.P. Briggs (1949: pp.60-73) discussed these terms in the **Journal of the American Oriental Society** and G.H. Luce (1958-9: pp.123-213 and pp.59-101) discussed the term 'Syam' at length in the **Journal of the Siam Society**.

from the land of the Khamti Tai in Assam India to the land of the Black Tai in North Vietnam, Tai women's costumes, which one sees in the rice fields, do not vary very much and are not much different from the national costume of present-day Thailand-a top bodice of rather a tight-fitting jacket with long-sleeves and a skirt that is quite long and narrow and often in a dark colour. More amazingly, the languages these Tai peoples speak are not considerably different. Tai languages spoken anywhere are monosyllabic tonal languages with resemblances in the basic core vocabulary (words for parts of the body, kinship, the lower numerals, pronouns, animals, plants, heavenly bodies such as sun, moon and stars and so on)[2]. Almost every traveller that has passed through the various Tai countries has noted that a certain uniformity seemed to reign over the Tai peoples and separated them from their neighbours such as the Burmese, the Hmong and the Chinese.

If we go form north to south and form west to east we can enumerate the different groups of the Tai peoples as the following:

Along the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra river in Assam, from Goalpara in the west to Sadiya in the east, there was once a Tai-speaking population using the **Ahom** language. The Ahom kingdom was the western most extension of Tai speakers; it was reputedly founded under the leadership of Sukapha[3] in 1215 A.D. Sukapha's dynasty continued to rule the Brahmaputra valley for more than 600 years until the coming of the British in India. However, the Tai Ahom ruling class was only a minority in the kingdom which was comprised mostly of people of Assamese Hindu culture. By the mid-eighteenth century, it has been speculated, Ahom ceased to be used as a spoken language. At present only a few of Ahom priests can read the valuable old chronicles written in Tai Ahom, called **Ahom Buranji**. Examples of fragments of Ahom texts can be found in Grierson (1903-28) and in Barua (1964). Tai Ahom is the only instance of a Tai language which has become extinct because of its too far-flung an outreach into the land of people with another tongue.

By contrast, the other Tai speaking people of Assam seem to have better retained Tai culture. At present more than 5000 **Tai Khamti** native speakers around Sadiya and Lakhimpur are still able to converse in their language among themselves even if all of them use Assamese, the official language of Assam, with outsiders. The other five separate Tai groups of Assam-the **Nora, Khamyang, Aiton, Phakial and the Turung**[4]

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[2]The "basic core vocabulary" is a technical term in Historical and Comparative Linguistics. It is presupposed that some items of the vocabulary, in any language, are better maintained through the passage of time than others, hence its use in comparative work whose aim is to reconstruct the earlier stage of the language in question (H.M. Hoenigswald 1960: p.159 ; W.P. Lehmann 1962: p.108). It is the constant rate of retention of the basic core vocabulary in a language that is the backbone of the comparativists' and reconstructionists' methodologies such as Morris Swadesh's (full bibliography in 1971) and his circle.

[3]E. Gait, **A History of Assam**, 1963.

[4]Vocabularies of these Tai languages can be found in early works such as Brandreth (1878). Girdpm (1895) and specifically Grierson (1904).

might go the deplorable way of Ahom, since the younger generation sees less and less relevance in remaining Tai amidst the Assamese culture. [5]

In Burma, the Shans, the Tai-speaking peoples of the Shan State retain their rigorous culture and the use of their language. The Shan State lies in the central-eastern half of the Union of Burma.[6] To the east its borders touch China, Laos, and Thailand. An important Shan kingdom called the Tai Mau existed on the bank of the river Mau (the present-day Shweli) during the seventh century A.D., and during the thirteenth century there occurred a large-scale Shan immigration from the east into the present-day Shan State. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, they were the chief rivals of the Burmese in the contest for supremacy throughout Burma. At present only the Shan State and the Karen State from time to time have been raising the question of secession from the Union of Burma[7]. Regarding demography, according to the 1931 census[8], 1,037,406 Tai Shan were listed. One recent official reference gives the recent Shan population as 3.7 millions out of a total national population of 35.3 million. Shan is used as one of the **lingua franca** in the Shan State along side of Burmese and Jingphaw. The other two Tai-speaking communities of Burma are the Tai Lü and the Tai Khün.

The **Tai Lü** concentration is in Southern Yunnan in the People's Republic of China. The Lü country in that area, traditionally known as Sip Song Pan Na (literally meaning or translated: the land of twelve thousand rice fields), occupies more than 6,000 square miles in the southern most part of Yunnan. From there the Lü spilled into Burma, Thailand, Laos and northern Vietnam. The Chinese refers to the Lü as Shui (Water) Pai-I because the Lü's habitation is usually in lowland valleys near rivers. But the term Pai-I is generic: the Chinese does not classify the Tai people in terms of language; under the grouping Pai-I, we can find the Tai Lü as well as the Tai Nua and the Tai Shan. This may be the reason why we have a higher estimation of the number of the Lü in earlier works. The scholar-missionary W.C. Dodd, in 1923[9], estimated that there were 350,000 Lü in Yunan and an additional 50,000 in Kengtung (Burma) and Laos. The Lü in Laos, according to P.B. Lafont[10], totalled 16,000. In the 1960', the Lü in Laos were numerous in western Phong Saly and also in northern and western Haut Mekong, and there were Lü villages along the Nam Tha and Nam Beng as well as in the vicinity of Luang Prabang. The situation after 1975 prevents us from specifying the locations as well as the exact number of the various Tai-speaking people in Laos and Vietnam at this moment. However, the number of the Lü in Vietnam was negligible; they were scattered along the

[5]Banchob Bandhumedha **Kalemantai** [Visiting a Thai Village], Bangkok, Language and Book Society, p.364 (in Thai).

[6]The name was changed to the Union of Myanma in June 1989.

[7]Josef Silverstein "Politics in the Shan State The Question of Secession from the Union of Burma" The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. XVIII, No.1, Nov. 1958, p.44.

[8]The 1931 Census of India.

[9]**The Tai Race,** Cedar Rapids, Torch Press, p. 185.

[10]"Les écritures' tay du Laos", **BEFEO**, vol.50, 1962, p. 370.

Vietnam-Chinese border west of the Black River. The Lü in Thailand came from both Burma and Yunnan China and settled down in several provinces in the north of Thailand. A recent estimate by Solot Sirisai of Tai Lü in the 6 provinces (Lamphun, Chiengrai, Phayaw, Phrae, Lampang and Chiengmai) in the north of Thailand is 48,239 people. [11]

The **Tai Khün** live along side the Tai Shan in the Burmese Shan State. But the Khün are limited largely to the main Kengtung valley in the center of the State. There are some recent immigrants from Kengtung into Thailand in Chiengrai and Chiengmai Provinces. Their language is very much like the Thai dialects of northern Thailand and the Tai Lü of Sip Song Pan Na, Yunnan. Khün orthography is the same as that of the Lü and is only slightly different from that of the northern Thai. However, legends have it that the Khün have ancestors different from the Lü and other Tai groups; Seidenfaden[12] thought that the Kengtung valley area was settled by the Tai-speaking people who came from Nanchao and these Tai people imposed their rule on an autochthonous Mon-Khmer people called Khüns. If Seidenfaden were right, the present-day Tai Khün must be one instance of the amalgamation of the Tai and Mon-Khmer people. Whether Seidenfaden was correct, the researchers who want to prove/disprove his claim will have to find evidence from sciences other than linguistics, for the two available descriptions of the Khün language that we have at present[13] do not indicate traces of Mon-khmer influence on the Khün language.

The Khün mix freely with the Lü and the Shan as they are all Tai-speaking peoples. There are many instances of mixed-marriages and there have been no attempts to separate the Khün from the Lü and the Shan. In their hometown of Kengtung, the Khün pay respect to the **Chao Fa** of Kengtung. In Thailand, the Khün mix with the other northern Thai, so there have been no population surveys separating the Khün from the other Tai groups.

We now turn from Burma to the countries where the Tai languages are languages of the majority, viz Thailand and Laos. In Thailand, 55.8 million people speak the Thai language. Of this number 53 million speak Thai as their mother tongue. Some 900,000 speak Northern Cambodian as their mother tongue but know Thai as well. Some 260,000 speak Karen (a Sino-Tibetan language, altogether different from Thai) as their mother tongue but have some knowledge of Thai. About 1.5 million speak Malay as their mother tongue and Thai as their second language. Some other 100,000 people speak several Meo-Yao and hill tribe languages which do not belong to the Tai language family. There are those who do not speak Thai as their mother tongue but who nevertheless are bilingual and can use Thai as their working language.

The Thai language in Thailand, though the sole national language of the country since the beginning of its history, is not without variations. At least 4 main

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[11] "The Population Survey of Thai-Tai Ethnic Minorities in Thailand", **Journal of Language and Culture**, Mahidol University, Bangkok, vol.8 no.1, 1989, pp. 108-109.

[12] **The Thai People**, Bangkok, Siam Society, 1958 p.51.

[13] a. Soren Egerod, "Essentials of Khün Phonology and Script", **Acta Orientalia**, XXIV (1959), pp. 123-146.

b. Rasi Petsuk, **General Characteristics of the Khün Language**, unpublished M.A. thesis, Mahidol University, 1978, p.196

dialects can be mentioned. **Central Thai** is the dialect of the central plain of which **Standard Thai** (an educated variety of the Bangkok tongue) is the prestigious representative. The Central Thai dialect has several subdivisions; to mention all of them would be too detailed for this non-technical paper. It suffices to mention the Suphanburi dialect which is the most notable in its tonal variation from other Central Thai dialects as much as to bring immediate recognition to its speaker whenever it is uttered. The Central Thai dialect is spoken throughout the central part of Thailand-as far north as Pitsanulok province; to the east the border of this central dialect touches Nakorn Rajsema province; to the south it is spoken as far as Prachuab Kirikhan province.

Northern Thai is spoken in the northern provinces of Thailand from Uttaradit up north. The dialect representing this group is the **Thai Yuan** or **Kham Muöng** (literally meaning or translated: language of the town) of Chiengmai province and its vicinity. In the old days these northern provinces constituted the Lan Na Thai (literally meaning or translated: the Thai of one million rice-fields land) principalities who paid tribute to the King of Chiengmai. Until the last century, this area had not used the national script of the central Thai government of Ayuddhaya and Bangkok but used their own script which is in appearance unlike the Burmese script. The Thai Yuan of northern Thailand resembles, linguistically speaking, the Shan, the Lü and the Khün of Burma and the Yuan of Haut Mekong in Laos more than it resembles Central Thai. Karl G. Izikowitz[14]mentioned that the Thai Yuan dialect served as a lingua franca in the Southern Haut Mekong in Laos in the 1950s. Izikowitz (1951: 23-24) as well as P.B. Lafont [15]reported the presence of Thai Yuan speakers in Laos, notably in the province of Sarabury, and that they numbered 3,000-5,000. The French sources used to refer to the Thai Yuan as Youon or Youanne or sometimes by the very enigmatic term "Lao". However, the Thai of Bangkok maintained that the Thai Yuan of the northern provinces were not to be confused with the Tai-speaking people of Laos since culturally they used to have an evidence of glaring difference on their physiques: the male Thai Yuan used to have black tattoos on their stomachs, whereas the Laotians were not fond of such decoration. Linguistically, the Northern Thai dialect is different from the Northeastern Thai dialect, although both of them show evidence of a common vocabulary exclusive to the Central Thai dialect.

Like Central Thai, the Northern Thai dialect or Thai Yuan has several subdivisions. Speakers of Chiengmai often boast (and this is accepted as true by other Thai northerners) that their dialect is the most melodious. Recognition of one Thai dialect as different from another Thai dialect usually is based on differences in some vocabulary as well as in the tonal system (number as well as tone shape and tone pattern), and the differences in some initial consonants. Final particles might be an additional clue for identifying dialects. However, in a non-technical treatment of the subject, it is not necessary to mention the subdivisions of the Northern Thai dialect, for the various Northern Thai dialects are very close to one another. For example, a study of the dialect of the Nan province in comparison with that of the Phrae province showed that in the phonological system they differ only in the diphthongs: Nan has three diphthongs

[14]Karl Gustav Izikowitz, **Lamet: Hill Peasants in French Indochina**, Ethnologiska Studier No. 17, Goteborg, Etnografiska Museet, 1951, p.375.

[15] Pierre-Bernard Lafont "Les ecritures' Tay du Laos" **Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient**, vol.50, 1962 pp. 367-393.

whereas Phrae has two.[16] Such a difference seems trivial in the eyes of almost all non-specialists.

Southern Thai is spoken by indigenous Thai-speaking people of Southern Thailand in 14 provinces down south, starting from Chumphorn to Narathiwat. Speakers of Southern Thai are known informally as speakers of **Pak Tai** (literally meaning or translated: the southern side). **Dambrö** is another name given to the Southern Thai dialect in western literature, such as that by Lebar and others,[17] and it was classified by them as a **patois** (1964 : 205). In reality, the Southern Thai dialect is less a case of a patois than a geographical dialect; if one cannot call an American Texan parlance a patois, then the Southern Thai dialect is definitely not a patois.[18] Besides **Dambrö** is considered by most Thai southerners as pejorative since it alludes to ignorance : literal translation of the phrase **Dambrö** is "How to……..how do you do that?" So the term should not be used to refer to the Southern Thai dialect.

There are greater variations within the Southern Thai dialect than what we have seen in the Central and Northern Thai dialects. This might be due to the fact that the southern parts of the country had never been grouped as vassal states under some prince who exercised a strong jurisdiction over the entire area. The central power from Ayuddhaya (and later from Bangkok) invested in the person of Chao Phya Nakorn Si Thammarat (a civil-servant not a governor with royal blood) was not keenly felt by the people in the southern adjacent provinces. This was very different from the power wielded by the Chiengmai princes, who although in theory vassals of the King of Ayuddhaya (and later of Bangkok), in actuality ruled as absolute monarchs.[19]The rough terrain in Southern Thailand also contributes to dialectal diversity. The Malay peninsula, the northern part of which is Southern Thailand, has a range of mountains with dense forests which divide the peninsula lengthwise. Communication by land across the peninsula was quite difficult prior to the time of modern highways. The many southern rivers are short with rapids and uninviting currents for travel. The combination of all these factors results in many differences among the several Southern Thai dialects. Even a non-specialist can point out that the Songkhla dialect is different from the Nakorn Si Thammarat dialect and that there exists a considerable difference between the dialects on the east coast (in provinces along the Gulf of Thailand) and the dialects on the west coast (in provinces along the Indian Ocean). The dialects on the west coast seem to have more

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[16]Siwaporn Chotecheun, **The Phonology of Nan with Comparisons to Phrae**, unpublished M.A. thesis, Mahidol University, 1986, p.231

[17]Frank M. Lebar, Gerald C. Hickey and John K. Musgrave (editors), **Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia**, Human Relations Area Files Press, New Haven, 1964, p.288

[18]A patois is, according to a dictionary (contemporary to Lebar and others' book,) by Mario Pei, Glossary of Linguistic Terminology (1966: p.196), "The popular unwritten speech in a given locality; the local dialect of the lower social strata, normally unwritten"

[19]Some knowledge of the Thai history might help clarify this point. David K. Wyatt's **Thailand A Short History**, Yale University Press, 1982, 1984, p.351, especially Chapters 4-6 is a good read, as well as David J. Steinberg and others, **In Search of Southeast Asia A Modern History**, Oxford University Press, 1971, 1975, p.552, especially pp.62-64, pp.107-117, pp.169-173, pp. 176-179.

Chinese loanwords and there are also some differences in the vowel sounds. Another significant dialect of the South was discovered by linguists[20] in recent years, as it has its focal area in Tak Bai district, Narathiwat province and continues into Kelantan, Malaysia.

Discarding fine points of difference among dialects, the Southern Thai can be viewed as a whole as a major dialect, the counterpart of the Central Thai, the Northern Thai and the Northeastern Thai dialects. Common characteristics among dialects of the South are the following: 1) they all share a number of particular vocabularies that are special to the southern dialects; 2) they seem to have a larger inventory of tones than other Thai dialects (having undergone the three-way split of a tonal system whereas other Thai dialects only passed through the two-way split); [21] 3) Southern Thai dialect speakers' common use of the shortened form of disyllabic and multisyllabic words accounts for the singularly harsh way of speaking considered by speakers of other Thai dialects as the southern trademark.

The **Northeastern** Thai dialect is spoken in 19 provinces in the Northeast of Thailand from Loei, Phetchabun, Nakorn Rajsema and Prachinburi eastward to the Thai-Laos border. This dialect is sometimes called Thai-Isarn in some authors works, especially that of Thai linguists', because Isarn means "northeast" However, in western linguists' works, it is sometimes called Lao, because it is very similar to Lao (which belongs to the Tai language family), the national language of Laos. This writer does not follow the western practice; since noone calls Lao, the national language of Laos, by the name 'Thai' though it is a well-known fact that it belongs to the Tai language family. There is no need to call the dialect that is spoken in Thailand, and belongs to the Tai language family, a Lao dialect.

The similarity between the Northeastern Thai dialect and Lao is due to the fact that the Thai northeastern provinces are populated in large number by descendants of the people who were brought from Laos during the wars between Thailand and Laos some 150-200 years ago.

As the ancestors of Thai northeasterners did not come from the same place in Laos, it is understandable that the Northeastern Thai dialect nowadays could be further subdivided if we were to look at it more closely. The northern subdivision includes the dialect spoken in Loei province. This dialect resembles the Lao dialect spoken in Luang Prabang, Laos.

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[20] J. Marvin Brown first mentioned this dialect as an entity in his book **From Ancient Thai to Modern Dialects**, Bangkok, Social Science Association Press of Thailand, 1965, IX, p.180 Later it was studied in depth in two M.A. thesis of Mahidol University: Wichit Srisuwitthanon, **Classification by Vocabularies: The Tai Tak Bai Language Group** (1985) p.223, and Chailert Kijprasert, **A Tonal Comparison of Tai Dialects: Takbai Group** (1985) p.277

[21] The theory concerning tonogenesis was systematically propounded first in A.G. Haudricourt's much quoted article "Bipartition et tripartition des systèmes de tons dans quelques langues d'Extrême-Orient", **Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris** 56.1: pp.163-180 (1961). Literature concerning this theory is given in J.A. Placzek's "Tones from Tai: distributional peculiarities of tonal systems in South East Asian languages" in **Computational Analyses of Asian and African Languages**, Tokyo, 1985.

The southern subdivision includes all the other dialects spoken in all the other northeastern Thai provinces, except in some districts of Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom. This southern subdivision resembles the Lao dialect spoken in Vientiane, Laos.

The last subdivision is spoken in and around the main towns of the provinces of Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom.[22] This subdivision does not resemble the Lao dialects, neither the Luang Prabang nor the Vientiane one, so it is referred to by its particular name: Nyo.[23] Nyo is different from the Northeastern Thai dialect, and in fact Nyo can be further subdivided into different dialects having very much alike names such as Yooy and Yuai, etc. Laotians regard speakers of Nyo as older inhabitants of their country. Earlier works such as those by Paul Macey (1906) and Robequain (1929) regarded them as pre-Thai inhabitants and reported their presence in Thanh-Hoa (Vietnam) and Hua Phan and Cammon (Laos). Since the names of the many dialects in this Nyo group resemble the names of the Tai dialects which are found farther north such as the **Yay** (William Gedney, 1965) and **Dioi** (Esquirol and Williate, 1908), it could be a subject of further investigation: to verify whether the Nyo group could be approached to Li Fang Kuei's Northern Branch of the Tai language family (see infra page 88).

As the Northeastern Thai dialect is spoken over a large area by more than 18 million speakers, there are a lot of dialectal variations from one district to another. Students of Thai dialectology still have work to do in order to present these variations in a unified picture. One certain thing is that the main criterion distinguishing one small dialect from another lies in the tones. Dialects spoken in important towns such as Khon Kaen, Udorn Thani and Ubol Rajthani are all recognized as representative of Northeastern Thai. At present not a simple dialect gains supremacy over the others, and there is no need for that since speakers of Northeastern Thai dialects can easily make themselves intelligible to one another.

Beside the Northeastern Thai dialect and Nyo, in the Northeastern part of Thailand, there are other languages belonging to the Tai language family which are felt, both by the speakers and by the Northeastern Thais, to be different languages. These languages are Phu Thai, Phuan, Kaloeng, Black Thai or Sông and Saek. These different languages have one aspect in common in that they are spoken by descendants of peoples who were transported from different places in Laos other than Luang Prabang and Vientiane around 150-200 years ago. Descendants of the former inhabitants of Luang Prabang and Vientiane, and other big cities such as Champasak, nowadays speak the common Northeastern Thai dialect. Speakers of Phu Thai, Phuan, Kaloeng, Black Thai or

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[22]There is a report of its presence in Maha Sarakham, Prachinburi and Saraburi provinces also. See Jerry W. Gainey and Theraphan L. Thongkum, **Language Map of Thailand** (1977).

[23]Spelling varies according to authors. J. Marvin Brown (1965, 1985) called this dialect Yo. Wutchai Jodking (1980) called it Yo and /ɲo:^{4}/, Kanjana Koowatthanasiri (1981) and Thepbangon Boonsner (1984) called it Nyo. This writer decided on the latter as it is truthful to the pronunciation the speakers of this dialect call their own language and does not ask for the phonetic alphabet /ɲ/ which might not be on most typewriters.

Sông[24] and Saek, who had already been minority peoples in the home country of their ancestors (Laos), speak languages felt to be distinct from the common Northeastern Thai dialect. Some, such as the Phuan, can pinpoint their original town in Laos to be Muöng Phuan in Xieng Khouang province in Laos. Some, such as the Kaloeng and the black Thai or Sông, cannot indicate their places of origin in Laos. However, the Black Thai or Sông and the Phuan are only found in very small numbers in the Northeastern provinces. The Thai army brought them to settle down more in the central provinces such as Lopburi, Saraburi, Suphanburi and especially Petchburi about 200 years ago.

Having thus briefly enumerated the major dialects spoken in Thailand, we now move on to another country, where a Tai language is also the national language; that is Laos. In Laos, **Lao** or the Lao language is the national language. Lao is recognized by most linguists to belong to the Tai language family but it is not called Tai. In this case, socio-political factors, rather than linguistic, play a major role in governing the choice of a name for a people and its national language. Laos has a separate history, and separate dynasty from the other Tai groups. The Laotians feel that the name of the people and the national language must keep this separate distinction. However, the Laotians call the other Tai-speaking peoples in their country who do not participate in their cultural tradition and who had not taken part in their effort in the forging of the Lao nation, by the name Tai, such as the Phu Thai, the Phuan which we have just seen and the Black Tai and Tai Neua. We shall talk first of the Lao language proper.

The Lao language is spoken by about half of the population of the country. In 1964, the total population of Laos was approximated at 2 million (Lebar and others 1964 : 215); about 1 million speak the proper Lao language and are concentrated in big towns in central and southern Laos such as Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Cammon, Champasak and Suvannakhet provinces. The other provinces in the north have fewer people. Lao speakers are than speakers of the other Tai languages. Sam Neua, Hua Phan, Xieng Khouang, Haut Mekong and Phong Saly have concentrations of Tai Neua and Black Tai. The present population of Laos is 3.0 million, so about 1.5 million must speak the proper Lao language.

The Lao language can be divided into at least 2 major dialects. The Northern dialect or **Lao Luang Prabang** is very much like the Loei dialect in Northeastern Thai which we have just discussed. The Central dialect or **Lao Vientiane** has a larger number of speakers than the Luang Prabang tongue since Vientiane has been the site of the Laotian government from the time the French made Laos its Protectorate. As we have seen, the Lao Vientiane dialect resembles the Northeastern Thai spoken in many northeastern provinces of Thailand. Recent research done by a Mahidol University student describes many points of resemblance between Lao Vientiane and the Northeastern Thai dialect spoken in Roi-Et province.[25] However, socio-political scenes in Southeast Asia change rapidly, and this is reflected in the development of languages especially in the areas of neologism and loan words. With the passage of time, it can be speculated that the gap between the Northeastern Thai dialect and the Lao language will

[24] A tonal maker ˆ indicates the falling-tone on the name of this language.

[25] Urairat Thongphiw, **A Phonological Comparison of Roi-Et Thai and Vientiane Lao**, unpublished M.A. thesis, Mahidol University, 1989, 250 p.

continue to widen as the Lao language at present has been imbued with communist-ideological-based coinage while the Northeast Thai dialect gravitates with Bangkok Thai as its focal point. The Southern Lao dialect of Suwannakhet is not much different from the Vientiane dialect and therefore is not distinguished from the latter in most general books on Lao.

Now we Turn to other Tai-speaking people of Laos. As it has been mentioned earlier, **Phuan** is spoken in Xieng Khouang in northern Laos. Ironically enough, in Laos the people who speak Phuan are called Thai Phuan, whereas the Phuan speakers in Thailand are sometimes called Lao Phuan, though the Thai official name for this people is Thai Phuan.

The original area of the **Phu Thai** in Laos used to be in the province of Hua Phan. Recent migration and relocation after 1975 make it difficult to pinpoint at present any of the ethnic groups in Laos. This is true in the case of the Phu Thai as well as the Phuan and the **Black Tai** and **Tai Neua**. It is generally assumed that the Phu Thai and the Phuan and the Black Tai in Laos speak the same languages as their counterparts who have the same name in Thailand, though at present no rigorous comparative study has been carried out. Black Tai and Tai Neua are also spoken in Vietnam. It would be interesting if future research work could be concentrated on a comparative study of the Black Tai language spoken in 3 places, namely Vietnam, Laos and Thailand; the same kind of study could be devoted to any Tai language found spoken in different countries. Our knowledge of the development of the Tai language family should be gained considerably through such a study.

Besides Black Tai, languages belonging to the Tai language family in Vietnam include **White Tai**, **Red Tai**, **Tai Neua**, **Tho**, **Nung** and **Giay** or **Nhang**. Speakers of these languages originally resided in the upland valleys of the north of Vietnam. It was the Indochinese conflicts after the second World War and later on the American-Vietnamese War that displaced the Tai ethnic groups in Vietnam and resulted in the settlements of some of them in south Vietnam, particularly around the multi-ethnic vicinity of Dalat and Tung Nghia. Of these Tai groups, **the Black Tai**, in view of their numbers, their possession of a high culture distinctive from Vietnamese culture and their high form of self-government, have been the subject of much commentary. P.B. Lafont (1955)[26] reported on their patriarchal family system and recently Jay Fippinger (1972) reported on their system of government.[27]The Black Tai's original area is in the provinces of Nghia Lo and Son La in the heart of ancient Tai principalities called **Sip Song Chau Tai** (literal translation: Twelve Tai princes) which were once located on the Red and Black rivers in northern Vietnam. They are found also in the provinces of Thanh Hoa and Nghe An. The **White Tai** are also found in the provinces of Son La and Nghia Lo and also in Lai Chau and Phong Tho. The population of the Tai language family in Vietnam was estimated in 1959 to be 344,628 (NNCDT[28] 1959: 242, cited by Lebar, Hickey and

[26]"Notes sur les familles patronymiques Thai Nories de Son-la et de Nghia-lo", **Anthropos**, vol.50, (1955), pp. 797-808.

[27]"Black Tai Government", **Southeast Asia** : an International Quarterly, vol. II, no. I, (1972), pp. 71-76.

Musgrave in 1964: 221). Another report by Roux and Tran (1954)[29] cited 18,000 White Tai in northern Vietnam. The **Red Tai's** principal place is in the district of Moc Chau (province of Son La) and in certain districts in the province of Hoa Binh and in the highlands of Thanh Hoa. Dang Nghiem Van (1971) reported that some Red Tai in Nghe An are called Tay Muong or Tay Chieng and in the district of Da Bac (province of Hoa Binh) people called them Tho. Descriptions of the Black Tai, White Tai and Red Tai languages can readily be found in the work of the doyen of Comparative Tai linguistics: Professor William Gedney of Michigan University, recently reprinted (1964, 1988). In an introductory work on the Thai language such as this one, there is no place to discuss the various ethnic names of the Tai people of north Vietnam for they are numerous and confusing to the extreme, as one would have to take into account not only how the Tai people call themselves, but also how the Laotian, the Vietnamese the Chinese, the French (in both old works of the 18^{th} – 19^{th} centuries writers and modern ones) and the American call them. People who really are interested in this subject have no other recourse but to do the fieldwork themselves. To give only one example of name-confusion, the case of the **Tho** can be cited. Lebar and others (1964: 232) said that: "The literary Vietnamese term for "soil", **Tho** is sometimes used to designate one who lives in the remote country, and the term Tho is therefore also used to designate a relatively large Tai-speaking population in rural northern Vietnam. Lafont (1961),[30] however, considers the designation Tho a Vietnamese term for the Tai groups to the east of the red river and contends that it includes some White and Black Tai. Claiming that Tho is a pejorative term, a North Vietnamese source refers to them as Tay (NNCDT[31] 1959: 37)".

One cultural trait that differentiates the Tho in the clear River delta and in the vicinity of Cao Bang from other Tai, such as the Black Tai and White Tai, is in the script. Tho have a script based on the Vietnamese **chu nom**, very closely related to Chinese calligraphy, whereas Black Tai and White Tai have Indian based orthography. Because, however, of many modifications made by the penmanship of generations of scribes who have had to use stylographs carved from bamboo or a brush dipped into Chinese black ink to write alphabets of the Indian invention, the Black Tai and White Tai alphabets look very different form other Tai orthography which have the same Indian origin. All in all we can say that the Tho are considered the most Vietnamized of the Tai groups in Vietnam. Lebar and others (1964: 232), quoting a North Vietnamese source, cited the number of the Tho in Vietnam as 437, 019.

Another country where there is a large number of Tai-speaking people is the People's Republic of China. In 1983, there were 760,000 Tai people in the province of

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[28]NNCDT is abbreviated from **Nhom Nghien Cuu Dan Toc** (Minority People's Study Group), Vietnam.

[29]Henri Roux and Trân Văn Chu, "Quelques minorités ethniques du Nord-Indochine", France-Asie 10 (9^{e} année) 92-3: pp.131-419.

[30]Pierre-Bernard Lafont, **Personal notes** (specific notes from previous field experiences in Laos and Vietnam) cited by Lebar, Hickey and Musgrave (1964: p. 232).

[31]See footnote No.28.

Yunnan; the majority of them concentrated in the Xishuangbanna[32]Dai Autonomous Prefecture in the south and the Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefectures in the west. Most Tai in the Yunnan province speak **Tai Lü** and **Shan**. The Chinese Shan area in western Yunnan includes the upper courses of the Taiping and Shweli rivers. The Chinese Shan and the Chinese Lü speak languages resembling those of their respective counterparts of the same name in Burma and Thailand.

The Tai-speaking people in Kweichow province of the People's Republic of China are known by a number of names: Jui, Yoi, I-chia, I-jen, Pu-yi, Chung-chia and Dioi (pronouncing Yoi). Dioi is probably the most well-known name as it is often used in Western language literature, and one of its dialects from the district of Tseheng has been compiled in a good work of the well-known scholar-missionaries Jos. Esquirol and Gust. Williatte since 1908[33]Contrary to the other Tai that we have described, the Dioi and other Tai speaking people in Kweichow, Kwangsi, Kwangtung and eastern Yunnan do not refer to themselves as Tai. In Fang Kuei Li's work (1959) another Tai dialect in roughly the same area as the one gathered by Esquirol and Williatte was presented under the name **Pu-i.** This language belongs to the same group as the **Po-ai** dialect spoken in the district of Fu-Ning in Yunnan province also described (in more details) by Fang Kuei Li (1957a, 1957b and 1977). Fang Kuei Li (1957a) stated that there are many dialects having the same characteristics as represented by Po-ai, spoken over a vast area in the southwestern part of Kweichow, the northwestern part of Kwangsi and the southeastern part of Yunnan, and he grouped these dialects under the branch of Northern Tai (1959, 1960). Fang Kuei Li might be credited, more than anyone else who contributed, which making known to the world these several Northern Tai dialects. The **Chuang** language spoken in Kwangsi also belongs to this Northern Tai group. The Chuang language is well-known for the sheer number of its speakers; Lebar and others (1964: 230) quoting a 1960' source stated the number of the Chuang at slightly over 7,000,000, three times more than the whole population of Laos during the same period. More recent sources augmented the number to be more than 8,000,000. The Chuang language has been described by many researchers. A Russian linguist, A.A. Moskalev (1976), has been devoting all his works to describing this language. On the whole, it can be said that languages in the Northern Tai branch are greatly influenced by Chinese. This can be seen in the amount of loanwords from Chinese and in the formation of phrases and sentences in which Chinese patterns have influenced the syntactic constructions of these Tai languages.

With Chuang, I would complete my lists of names of the Tai languages spoken in different countries. In a paper giving general knowledge of the Thai language such as this one, it is less cumbersome to omit the names of several small Tai languages spoken on the Vietnam-China border such as Trung-cha (Lebar and others 1964: 231). Also to be omitted are languages related to the Northern Tai branch which are sufficiently distinct

[32]This is the Chinese rendering of the Tai pronunciation of the name of the Tai Lü (see supra) country, traditionally known as Sip Song Pan Na.

[33]**Essai de la Dictionaire Dioi-Français** réproduisant la langue parlée par les tribus Thai de la haute rivière de l'Ouest suivi d'un vocabulaire Français-Dioi, par Jos. Esquirol et Gust. Williatte de la Société des Missions-Étrangères, Hongkong, Imprimérie de la Société des Missions-Étrangères, 1908, p.669.

from other Tai languages so as to form a separate group such as the Kam-Sui languages in the southeastern part of Kweichow and along the Hunan border (Fang-Kuei Li, 1965). Languages, which are not exactly related to Tai, but felt by some to be distant cousins of the Tai language and which help form a link with the Austronesian languages, such as Paul Benedict's Kadai languages (1942, 1975), are as also excluded from discussion in this paper.

In Cambodia,[34]there have been speakers of a Tai language resembling the Northeastern Thai dialect of Prachinburi in the 3 easternmost provinces: Pratabong, Kemaraj, and Srisophon. The unfortunate bloody scenes in that country after 1975, the drastic reduction of the population, make us reluctant to guess the number of Tai speaking people in Cambodia nor their whereabouts. It is most likely that if there are any left, their number would be negligible, for most of the Cambodians who could speak Thai, or who had relatives over the border, fled to Thailand since the beginning of the unrest.

Theories concerning the origin of the Tai language and the Tai homeland

As we all know, language and humankind are inseparable. One cannot imagine a full-fleshed human being unfurnished with speech, devoid of a means of communication of thought to other human beings. Simplistic theories about primitive people who remained mute and who gesticulated with an occasional grunt, have been long abandoned since the dawn of linguistic sciences. As there must have been people populating this Earth for more than one million years, language, one of man's greatest intellectual accomplishments, is immeasurably ancient. Our knowledge about historical time, however, does not date back over the past 7,000 years. Consequently, discussions of the origin and evolution of language, any language, have been a taboo in the field of linguistics for a number of years. For example, in the French Société de Linguistique, if some bold soul dares invoke this question, the best that he could hope to get is contemptuous raised eyebrows. And we can sympathize with the French scholars; their silence is due to the inadequate knowledge that we have on the subject. No fossil cries were ever found at the Ban Chieng[35]dig, as we go with Morris Swadesh's (1971: 158) tongue in cheek remark "because sounds do not turn to stone". The science of today enables us to date the earliest bones in Ban Chieng around 4430 B.C. (Charoenwongsa and Diskul 1978: 45), but it cannot tell us which language those earliest jaws formulated, though some Thai scholars, in their nationalistic enthusiasm, readily saw the resemblance between the skeletons of Ban Chieng and the present-day Thai people. Having thus phrased the caveat, the writer asks for the reader's understanding that attempt has not been made in this article to answer the unanswerable question: the origin of the Tai language. However, the question about the homeland of the Tai people, though put forth with the same kind of curiosity (human attempts to probe the unsubstantiated past), still permits some lines of research. Theories put forth by different researchers will be

[34]The commonly known name of the country is used here.

[35]Ban Chieng in Udorn Thani province in the northeast of Thailand is one of the best known archaeological site of the country. Reports on it abound in scholastic journals for the last 20 years. New comers to Southeast Asian scenes could begin with Pisit Charoenwongsa's **Ban Chieng**, Bangkok, 1973.

enumerated chronologically (the oldest theory first) in the following. Again I must be cautious that all of these are still theories, not proven facts.

1. The Altaic homeland This theory may be recorded as one of the most unlikely ideas of the century, yet it had won the official sanction of the Thai government until very recently. Even today there are still some diehard believers who consider those who question this theory unpatriotic. How is it that locating the homeland of the Tai speaking people at the foot of the Altai mountains amounts to patriotism? We might understand this attitude if we put this theory into the time-frame when it was first conceived. In the later years of the reign of King Rama VI (AD.1910-1926) and in the early years of King Rama VII (AD.1926-1934), there was a strong movement of nationalism in Thailand and particularly an anti-sinitic movement. King Rama VI wrote an essay in which he called the Chinese "the Oriental Jew" and in many plays that he wrote he depicted Chinese men as "bad guys" or "spies of the (some unspecified) enemy". The idea underneath the Altaic homeland theory was that the Thai people, as a nation, had suffered much under the hands of the Chinese intruders who plundered our land incessantly and forced us to move down a long way from the Altai mountains in Mongolia to the present site of Thailand. The crux of this theory is that at present the Thai is at the last ditch from where there will be no possible retreat: further steps will put the Thai people into the Gulf of Thailand to be swept out into the Pacific ocean. When we understand the idea underneath the Altai theory, it will not be difficult to understand why the government sponsored lectures among the village-scouts, in the campaign against the communist insurgents a decade ago. We used to proclaim the theory about the Altai origin of the Thai people. It is unbelievable that they stated it as a sacred-fact, not a possible theory. Who was responsible for putting forth this theory? It would be difficult to pinpoint the originator; as it has been said above, the theory reflected the ideas prevalent among educated Thais in the early part of this century. However, the man who put it forth in writing is Khun Vichit-Matra, a jurist and man-of-letters. His book entitled **Lak Thai** (literal translation is **Thai Pillar**), written under his penname "Kancanakaphan", won the Thai government award as the best essay of the year in 1928 AD. In this book, the Altaic homeland of the Tai-speaking people was described and the time frame was speculated at 7,000 years ago. As it reflected the ideas of the period so it caught on rapidly. In 1937, the Royal Survey Department of the Ministry of Defense printed a map of the historical movements of the Tai-speaking people depicting the starting point of the journey to be the Altai mountains. The Altaic idea and the map, showing an elephant moving down along a vertical line from the Altai mountains, and following the longitude of 100° across the Kansu and Szechuan provinces of China to Yunnan, and finally to Thailand, were repeated in many books that followed Khun Vichit-Matra's **Lak Thai**, such as in Phra Barihan-Thepthani's **Prawat Chat Thai** (History of the Thai Nation) which was printed as late as A.D. 1968 (though the manuscript was written much earlier as Phra Barihan-Thepthani is a contemporary of Khun Vichit-Matra). Some dissenting voices were raised, nevertheless, among Khun Vichit-Matra's own contemporaries, notably Phya Kosakorn-Vicarn; in the Silpakorn Journal in 1948 A.D. He questioned the theory which, as he said, was based on such little thing as the likeness of the names Al**tai** and the **Tai** people. However, dissenting voices have been feeble for many years, at least among the Thais. It awaited the arrival of western anthropologists, who could point out the obvious without suffering

the tarnish of unpatriotism. B.J. Terwiel (1979: 5) summarized the improbability of the Altaic theory in these terms:

"Although nobody is as yet certain where the ancestors of the Tai peoples lived several millennia B.C., it is highly unlikely that it was anywhere near Mongolia. The Tai peoples are everywhere intimately associated with rice-growing in the relatively warm and flat lowlands of southern China and mainland Southeast Asia. Their traditional houses are also adapted to suit the wet lowlands: these are built on stilts. A culture which originates from Mongolia and travels during the last millennia B.C. through the northern Chinese deserts to warmer regions cannot be associated with irrigated rice and houses on stilts. There is no historical or archaeological evidence which makes it plausible that the Tai ever were within a thousand miles of Mongolia or the Altai mountains."

2. The Nanchao homeland Nanchao is the name of the ancient kingdom in Yunnan whose court was centered at Tali-fu during 2205 B.C. – 1253 A.D. The history of the kingdom of Yunnan, as reported by M. Carthew (1952), was written by a Chinese scholar, Yang-Tsai, in 1537 A.D. and was discovered and translated into English by G.W. Clark in 1894 AD. This book, called "History of the Southern Princes" is extremely obscure as, we are told, G.W. Clark published it by his own means in a very limited edition for distribution to his friends. As Carthew wrote, only four copies are now known to exist and they are all in the hands of one owner. Carthew did not identify that owner, saying that, "at any rate at the present date this book is unknown in the libraries of Europe and America" (Carthew 1952: 2). If we are willing to believe in the stories in this book, we have only Carthew (now deceased) to trust. The "History of the Southern Princes", as related to us by Carthew, gives a detailed account of the Thai "race" in Yunnan from the earliest times. The beginning is compiled from local legends, but the recorded history commenced only in 280 B.C. It gives the name of every king who ruled the Nan Chao kingdom and the chief events of each reign until the kingdom ceased to exist as an independent kingdom after its conquest by Kublai Khan in 1253 A.D.

There are two big problems concerning this book that, we are told, was translated by G.W. Clark. First of all, its rarity, which amounts to non-existence, does not permit further line of research. Secondly, even if we trust that M. Carthew had copied accurately what had been said in the "History of the Southern Princes", trust that G.W. Clark had done the most faithful service of translation, and that the Chinese scholar Yang-Tsai had accurately described historical events in Nan Chao, there is still a question of identification to be solved: the question of the Tai-ness of the Nan Chao kingdom. Carthew himself admitted that, "In the whole history there is no single trace of a Thai name with the exception of the word "Chao" or chief. Every name sounds like a Chinese name" (Carthew 1952: 2). But he also tended not to question too much and seemed to be contented with, "If however one examines the Chinese records of pilgrimages, embassies, etc., to foreign countries from the beginning of the Christian era down to the end of the 19th century, all names, even English names, are made to sound as if they were Chinese." (Carthew ibid). So Carthew was proud to present to the audience of the Siam Society in 1952 that the "History of the Southern Princes" was in fact the history of the Thai in Yunnan. Apart from the "History of the Southern Princes", Carthew also mentioned Gerini as the first person to connect the kingdom of Nan Chao with the Thai of Thailand. Unluckily, he did not specify which Gerini? And which pieces of work by Gerini?

As for the first question, it is not too difficult to trace. In all the historical and philological literature concerning Siam of the old days, there was only one researcher by the name of Gerini. He was Major G.E. Gerini who wrote exchanged views with E.H. Parker concerning the question of the terms **Shan** and **Siam**. The second question sent this present researcher to dig up all known pieces of work by Gerini listed in bibliographies. The result was most unexpected. Instead of championing the opinion that the Thai of Thailand are descendants of the Nan Chao people, it was found in Gerini's article entitled "Shan and Siam" that he (Gerini) believed that Siam (the present country of the Thai people) has always stood in its present place on the Gulf of Siam[36], and he believed that this is the country identified by Ptolemy as Samaradê. Gerini was absolutely certain in his opinion and wrote in the strongest of terms which are too long to quote here. Suffice may be this example "……..I have yet another argument which is decisive on the point and throws the name of Siam right back into the very first century of our era. This argument was the outcome of my researches on the ancient geography of Indo-China which resulted in the identification of most places named by Ptolemy in the **India Extra-Gangem**, and enabled me to show that the city or district of Samaradê located by the eminent Alexandrine geographer on the shores of the Gulf of Siam, is nothing more nor less than **Samaratthe** or Syamarastra, i.e., Siam proper. This identification is absolutely certain and no possible muddling and shuffling of Ptolemy's data can shake it." (Gerini 1898: 148) Gerini may be proved right or wrong in his opinion. Only time can tell. But to the present researcher's understanding, he was not one of the champions of the Nan Chao homeland for the Tai people. On the contrary, Gerini may be interpreted as the precursor of the idea that the Tai people have always been on the present site of the kingdom of Thailand (see infra on page 81). The finer point of difference is that Gerini identified the place name of Siam and did not say much as to the ethnic group which was occupied by the names of neither Tai nor Thai nor Siamese.

The idea about the Nan Chao homeland of the Tai people was based not only on the evasive "History of the Southern Princes" as already mentioned, but also on the work of one famous scholar of the last century: Terrien de Lacouperie. Unfortunately, this scholar was much quoted, sometimes second-handedly or even third-handedly, without bothering to read closely what he had exactly said. It is the present writer's doubt that if modern scholars had scrutinized what de Lacouperie had said exactly that they would have continued to quote him, with our modern knowledge of the ethnic groups and languages of Southeast Asia. Let us take a look at what de Lacouperie had to say about the "Tai Shan race": "their ancestors seem to have been more than anything else, mere offshoots of the great Mon race, settled westwards that is to say in the north of modern Setchuen, where their racial characteristics slowly developed……An ethnological hypothesis which would make the Tai Shan race the outcome of an intermingling in irregular proportions of Mon, Negritos, and Chinese, would not be objectionable in any way, linguistic, historical, or physiological". (De Lacouperie 1885: 1) Nowadays it would be quite difficult for ethnologists to view the development of a "race" in this way, still more difficult to find linguists who would view the formation of the Tai language as the outcome of an intermingling in any regular or irregular proportions of Mon (which

[36]Gerini wrote the article in 1898 so he called the Gulf of Thailand by its old name: the Gulf of Siam.

belongs to the Austroasiatic language family) and Negritos (which, taken to mean the languages of the negritos-like people of Malaysia, belongs also to the Austroasiatic language family), and Chinese. And if one is not sufficiently boggled and continues his book, de Lacouperie had this to say about the Shan, "I am not indisposed to say that the continue **Shang** (i.e. traders) who overthrew the Hia dynasty and gave their name to the following one, were connected with the Shan race, and that their very name (or a form of it) is perhaps the antecedent of that of Shan or Siam. Many names much like these, such as Tchang, Siang, Shen, Sien, etc., etc., are met with in the nomenclature of native clans and tribes of the same stock in its earlier seats in Central China, and leave no doubt that they all represented one original name." (de Lacouperie, ibid). In the flowing enthusiasm in ethymologicla exercise, de Lacoupie equated the Shan with the Mung thus, "The great Mung, or Ta Mung, are obviously of the same race, in which we cannot fail to recognize the Mung, the Shan……their exact spot was in the Western part of the Setchuen province…… They formed the leading family of the Nantchao agglomerations as well as that of several others in later times." (de Lacouperie: ibid li).

Oddly enough the dissenting voices[37] opposing the theory that the Nan Chao people who were Thai did not spear-head their attacks at de Lacouperie's flimsy ethymological exercise (the connection of the Shan people and the Chinese dynasty of Shang) nor on his view that Tai Shan was a métis language resulting from the mix of Mon, Negritos and Chinese. Michael Blackmore (1967) and B.J. Terwiel (1978 and 1979) did excellent jobs of summarizing why we should not view Nan Chao or the area around Tali in Yunnan as the Tai homeland. The essence is this. The great traveler, H.R. Davies (1909), noted from his traveling experience in Yunnan that the Shan and Mon-Kmer languages were hardly spoken north of the latitude 25˚ N. As Tali, the capital of Nan Chao, is situated well to the north of 25˚ 50′ N, it was not likely to be the dwelling place of the Tai speaking population. Later the German geographer, Wilhelm Credner (1935), supported Davies by stating that to his finding the present-day habitat of the Shans of Yunnan was restricted to the tropical valleys of southern Yunnan. Credner also noticed that the Shan of Yunnan cultivated only rice, during the summer, while in winter they preferred to relax at home and did not take up the cultivation of temperate grains such as wheat and barley, which were cultivated by their neighbours who came from the north. Blackmore paraphrased Credner in this way, "Credner stated this could only happen with a people long accustomed to a tropical climate with rice as their traditionally cultivated food plant. Their migration into the tropical valley and valley plains of southern Yunnan could not have taken place form the north, but only form the east, from the tropical lowland of the river plains and coastal regions of South China" (Blackmore 1967: 64). The Yunnanese Shan, as viewed by Davies and Credner, are thus very far removed from the descendants of the Shang dynasty in Central China as proposed by de Lacouperie.

Another supporting weight against the Nan Chao homeland for the Tai people was made on the evidence of the names of the kings of Nan Chao. In the Legends of Nan-

[37]Notably the scholars who refuted the theory that the Tai's homeland was in Nan chao are, to list them chronologically: 1). Henry Rudolph Davies **Yunnan**: **the link between India and the Yangtze** (1909): 2) Wilhelm Credner, **Cultural and Geographical Observations in the Tali (Yunnan) Region with special reference to the Nan-chao Problem** (1935); 3) and Frederick W. Mote, "Problems of Thai prehistory" (1964). Of course the authors who proposed the other homeland for the Tai people can be taken by implication as not pro-Nan Chao.

Chao compiled by Yang Shên and quoted in Lo Ch'ang P'ei (1945: 361) the genealogy of the kings of Nan-chao according to Pa's **Ancient History** is:

Pyo-tso-ti-mung-tso Mung-tso-tu. After that there are thirty-six generations down to the following:

1. Si-nu-lo
2. Lo-ch' êng
3. Ch' êng-lo-pi
4. P' i-lo-ko
5. Ko-lo-fêng
6. Fêng-kia-yi
7. Yi-mou-sun
8. Sün-lo-k' üan
9. K' üan-lung- ch' êng
10. Ch' êng-fêng-you
11. Shih-lung
12. Lung-shun
13. Shun-hwa-chen

Lo Ch'ang-P' ei (1945) pointed out that the genealogical patronymic linkage system is a dominant cultural trait of the Tibeto-Burman speaking tribes, and he had shown that this patronymic linkage system existed among the Burman, the A-chit, the Moso or Na-khi, the Lolo, the Woni and the A-ka. This added testimony of the patronymic linkage system of the names of the Nan Chao rulers seems to put the Tai out of the ruling house of Nan-chao. There has never been throughout Tai history such a record of name linkage. Nor are there records of three-syllable names, first-middle-final, such as quoted. Names of earlier Tai kings (prior to the Sanskrit-Pali and Khmer influences) consisted of only one syllable usually, but not obligatorily, beginning with the same consonant (with a remarkable incidence of the /1/ initial consonant) from father to sons such as **Hkun[38] Long** and **Hkun-Lai** (from Gogoi's **Tai-Ahom**, **Religion and Customs**, 1976: 3) or **Kun[38] - Lung, Kun-Lai, Koun[38]- Borom** or **Bolom** and **Koun La** (from Lefevre-Pontalis' **L'invasion Thaie en Indo-Chine**, 1909: 497) or **Lo T'ai Lü T'ai** or **Li T'ai** (names of Kings of Sukhodaya (form C. Coedes **Receuil des inscription du Siam** 1924 and 1978: 13, 61, 76, 91).

At present, in scholastic circles at least, the idea that the Nan Chao state during the 7th - 13th centuries was ruled by a Tai dynasty has been discredited. However, there are some fierce patriots who view the fall of this theory as equal to the shrinking down of Thai territory. The present writer remembers one poignant question from one Thai dramaturgist to a Thai scholar, "Why did you want to cease our great territory of Nan Chao at the instigation of foreign researchers?"

3. The coastal regions of south China and north Vietnam There are so many scholars who arrived at this conclusion one after another, basing their reasoning on several academic disciplines over a long span of time, that it is necessary for researchers to look at some of the important works proposing this theory.[39]

[38]Hkun, Kun, and Koun all are pronounced /khŭn/ with the rising tone in Thai. The different way of writing is due to different authors who worked separately before the advent of the International Phonetic Alphabet. /khŭn/ means 'king or chief' so it is a title preceding the kings' own given names which follow /khun/.

[39]Limited of space, the present writer cannot claim a complete list of every argument said on the subject. For details please consult works with direct bearing on the subject such as B.J. Terwiel's "The Origin of the T'ai Peoples Reconsidered" (1978) and "The Tai of Assam and their Life-cycle ceremonies (Part I)" (1979).

Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, the father of Thai historians, considered that the whole region in the southern part of China from Hu-Nan, Kuei-Chou, Kuang-Tung and Kuang-His was inhabited once by the Tai (1924: 13).[40] Prince Damrong did not indicate his source but probably he might have considered the **San Kuo, or Romance of the Three Kingdoms**[41]as his point of reference since he alluded to this book and quoted the year 400 of the Buddhist Era (143 B.C.) as the first time that the Chinese began to push the Tai, under the chief Beng Hek, form the Tai's homeland. This view of Prince Damrong has had a profound effect on many Thai scholars, notably the former Prime Minister, M.R. Khukrit Pramoj, who popularized the heroic struggle of Beng Hek under the hands of the Chinese strategist Chu-Ko Liang; and Khukrit Pramoj is one of the most widely read authors in Thailand.

At least three ethnologist-historians for one reason or another have arrived at the conclusion that the Tai were the former inhabitants of the fertile lowlands of south-eastern China. Von Eickstedt (1944: 155-130, quoted by Wiens 1954: 30 and by Terwiel 1979: 6) claimed that southern China was actually the land of the Tai. Eberhard (1950: 19,21) traced the Tai (together with the Yao and the Tunguses) culture to the Lung-shan culture and considered the Tai to be the eastern neighbours of the Shang dynasty (C.1600-1028 B.C.). And during the time of the unrest narrated in the **Romance of the Three Kingdoms** (220-265 A.D.), continued Eberhard, the Tai had resided in the state of Wu (near the present Naking). "It's country (the state of Wu) consisted of marshy, water-logged plains, or mountains with narrow valleys. Here Tai people had long cultivated their rice, while in the mountains Yao tribes lived by hunting and by simple agriculture" (Eberhard ibid: 111). In this book of history Eberhard, it is not explicit as to the reasons why he considers all lowland rice-growers of southern China to belong to a Tai-type culture. Nevertheless, his reasons must have stemmed from his research into the comparative cultures of the various people of south and east China. In Eberhard (1968), he describes various cultural complexes or motifs which, to his terms, are cultural chains the detailed characteristics of Thai culture, such as farming of rice in river-valleys and the chewing of betel nut, and these are characteristics of the people of the south China.

The southern part seems of China (as suggested by Von Eickstedt) and the southeastern part of China (as suggested by Eberhard) to be a vast area. We have to wait for the third ethnologist-historian to narrow down the area as to the possible homeland of the Tai people. Mote (1964) observed that there is good evidence for a limited movement of the Tai some 150 or 200 miles up the Mekhong River into Central Yunnan, and

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[40]Prince Damrong Rajanubhab wrote in Thai. (The exact transliteration of the names of the four Chinese provinces that he mentioned are [Hun-Năm]. [Kui-Cĭw], [Kwang-Tûng] and [Kwang-Săi].) These are no doubt after the pronunciation of the Tae-Tsiw Chinese in Bangkok. The present researcher took the liberty of writing the names of the four provinces in the forms that are more familiar in English history books such as appears in Herold J. Wiens', **China's March Towards the Tropics** (1954).

[41]**San Kuo** is an epic which describes the epoch of unrest and division in China during 220-580 A.D. Most western readers are familiar with this book through the English translation by C.H. Brewitt-Taylor (1925) under the name **Romance of the Three Kingdoms**. But **San Kuo** has been popular in Bangkok since the time of King Rama I who ordered the translation of it from Chinese around 1802 A.D. The translated manuscript was published in Bangkok in 1865 A.D.

perhaps for short distances northward into other places in south China. Mote also suggested that the Tai people may have originated in the region between Kwangtung and northern Vietnam.

Motes' suggestions agreed exactly with what a famous linguist had suggested a decade earlier. A.G. Haudricourt wrote in 1953 that "The Tai languages situated west of the Red River such as Siamese, Shan, Lao, White Tai, Black Tai are very similar to one another; on the contrary, on the eastern side of that river we find the languages which are

more or less aberrant:[42] Dioi, Caolan, Mak, Sui, or languages which are distant cousins such as Kelao, Tulao, Lati, and Laqua. It seems that the Tai languages may have originated in the south of China and may not have spread across the Red River[43] before the 10th century A.D."[44] (Haudricourt 1953: 123). Later linguists such as Chamberlain also put the headwater of the Tai in the Red river delta, "……the Tai began migrating westward and southwestward from the ancient capital of Ba Thuc in the eighth century, and that during the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries they found their way approximately to their present homes in Southeast Asia." (Chamberlain 1975: 58). In another work based on evidence from zoological taxa which referred to animals found only along the coast as opposed to further inland, Chamberlain feels more and more convinced that the ancestor of Proto-Tai must have inhabited the valley of the lower Yangtze (Chamberlain 1979: 1 and 2).

Benedict's famous study (Benedict 1942) that put into the limelight 4 distant cousins of the Tai language: Laqua, Lati, Kelao and Li also serves to draw our attention to the China-North Vietnam border region. Laqua and Lati are languages of the China-Tonkin border region; Kelao is the language of southcentral China; and Li is the language of the island of Hainan. Benedict invoked these four languages as evidence of an archaic Thai-Indonesian linguistic complex. In Benedict's view, these four languages, which he grouped under the term Kadai Languages, from a bridge linking the Tai linguistic stock

[42]Linguistics has contended (since Sapir 1921: 151) that the original country of a language is where we find a large number of dialects (such as on the British Isles where we find different dialects of English), and we find conformity or a relatively less number of dialects in the place where that language has just spread (such as in the USA where there are a lesser number of the English dialects though the North American continent is very much larger than the British Isles).

[43]The ethnologist, K.G. Izikowitz, arrives also at the same conclusion and specifically mentions the Red River delta as the place where the Tai must have been prior to the coming of the Vietnamese (Quoted by Terwiel 1979: 7). In the time-frame in which we are interested there has not yet been Vietnam. The Vietnamese are still refered to as the Yueh tribes, autochonous of the area of the present Hangchow.

[44]This is my rough translation of Haudricourt "Les languages thai situées à l'ouest du Fleuve Rouge: siamois, shan, laotien, tai blanc, tai noir sont extrèmement proches les unes des autres, au contraire à l'est de ce fleuve on rencontre des langues plus ou moins aberrantes: dioi, caolan, mak, sui ou lointainement apparentées: kelao, tulao, lati, laqua. Il semble donc que les languages thai soient originaires du sud de la Chine et n'aient franchi le Fleuve Rouge que vers le xe siècle." Haudricourt does not use the term "Tai". He calls both Tai (the Tai people outside Thailand) and the inhabitants of Thailand by the same term "Thai". My translation makes use of the term "Tai" to be in conformity with the rest of the article.

and the Indonesian linguistic stock. Whether we subscribe to Benedict's theory or not, it is undeniable that the southern China-Tonkin border is the area in which is found the highest number of Tai dialects, some of them (such as the said Kadai) very aberrant from the mainstream Tai. This fits well into the linguistic explanation that such an area might be the original place in which the Tai languages developed. In later study, Benedict took up the question again and wrote, "The Austro-Thai language family, as recently set up by the writer (1966), includes Indonesian and the Austronesian languages in general, together with Thai, Kadai, and certain "para-Thai" languages (Kam-Sui, Ong-Be). **The data presented in this study point to an origin on the Asiatic mainland, roughly in the South China region**.[45] (Benedict 1975: 35). Thus, Benedict's view as to the relationship of the Tai language family may be different from others in that he sees a linkage of the Tai language with Indonesian, but his view on the homeland of the Tai goes along with other linguists and ethnologists who place it in the South China region.

This is also the view of the present writer. Apart from the usual linguistic argument that the Red River delta counts the highest number of Tai dialects, this area presents several cultural traits that, in my opinion, belong to the Proto-Tai, prior to the Indian (and Buddhist) influence. This area was also originally a federation of twelve Tai states called Sip Song Chau Thai, which means the twelve Tai chiefs, or twelve Tai states. This division into several city-states reflects the earlier political grouping of the Tai before their consolidation into a kingdom. The name of the chief town in this area is also significant. Dien-Bien-Phu was built on the earlier site of a Tai town named Muöng Theng (pronounced thɛɛŋ) which means 'city of god(s)'. Theŋ theeŋ or theeng is a Proto-Tai Word for 'god(s)', occurring in many Tai dialects from Assam (India) to the south of China. The Tai of earlier times, as well as to today, have had the tendency to call their city 'the city of god(s)'. Nowadays we call it **Krung-thep**. **thep** is from the Pali-Sanskrit **deva** meaning god(s). The name Muong Theng is testimony of the same Tai mentality with the use of the proper Tai word instead of a Pali-Sanskrit loan. Also significant is the fact that the Black River and the Red River arise in upper Tonkin and that the Dien-Bien-Phu area is the area inhabited by the Black Tai. Studies[46] of the culture of the Black Tai, practices such as the veneration of and sacrifice of Phi Muöng (spirit guarding the town), the land use system, as well as their folklore and legends, often suggest that these are things that should have existed prior to the time of Buddhist influence from India on the Tai. Some archaeological researches also point in the same direction. Bayard (1975, quoted by Terwiel 1979: 7) places Thai-Kadai-speakers of the fourth and third millennium B.C. in the coastal regions of where is now northern Vietnam and south China. As to the latter's view, the present writer feels increasingly sure about the where than the when. The fourth and third millennium B.C. is too far back in the past to permit any verification with linguistic tools. Archaeologists might have a better say at this point. The age of Proto-Tai, the common stock from whence all Tai languages developed, has been estimated by Gedney to be not more than two thousand years ago. (Gedney 1988: 69)[47] This more recent time-frame is based on the similarity among Tai dialects of today

[45]Emphasis is mine. Benedict did not underline his statement.

[46]Older ones such as H. Maspero (1916), Rispaud (1937) as well as more modern ones such as Fippinger (1972), Izikowitz (1951) Lafont (1955, 1959), and Hartmann (1981).

(if Tai dialects are that similar, they might not have been separated for a long time from each other). However, given a strong form of government such as that developed among the Black Tai with its intricate closely knitted system of marriage among the chiefs' families, can a more remote time-frame be hypothesized for Proto-Tai? Similarity can be due to early standardizing factors such as good communication, intermarriage and last but not least, literacy (at least among the ruling class). The last point is worth pondering if we notice that the Tai dialects which are the most aberrant from the others are dialects which have not had an alphabet until the coming of western missionaries in the 17th and 18th centuries.

4. The Indonesian homeland There are also proponents of a theory that Tai peoples had their homeland in the South, along the Indonesian archipelago and particularly on the Javanese island. Fewer number of scholars adhere to this theory than to the third theory. Among the very first explicit rejections of the theory of placing the Thai into a Sino-Thai group linguistically or ethnologically speaking, the name of the Danish autodidact ethnologist, Eric Seidenfaden, can be cited (Seidenfaden 1958 published in 1967: 1). Seidenfaden also referred to earlier scholars (Dr. Mademoiselle Colani, Louis Finot, Olov Janse, Goloubew) who had studied the inhabitants of Northern Vietnam (Vietnamese, Muongs, Tai Tho, Tai Nung and the Yao) and arrived at the opinion that these peoples come nearer to the Indonesian element than to the Mongolian. The German anthropologist von Eickstedt was also cited by Seidenfaden (ibid: 6) as having noticed that the Thais are so strikingly like the Philippinos. However, all these scholars, though they believe in the Thai-Indonesian affiliation, never talked about the Tai migration from the South. Their position on the subject was like that of Paul K. Benedict (viz supra). To the contrary, Dr. Somsak Phansomboon, a medical doctor, based his study upon his own research into the blood group distributions of 421 blood samples collected from patients in Siriraj Hospital and found that "The Thai race has a very high B frequency, which is characteristic of southeastern and central Asians. The Thai people also possess a rather high M. frequency, which agrees well with that of the population of the Malay Archipelago" (Phansomboon 1957: 58), and "It will be seen that the gene frequency percentages of these blood factors of the Thai closely resemble those of the Indonesians, and particularly those of the Javanese" (Phansomboon ibid: 62), and finally "My investigation of the ABO, MNS, RL, Lewis, Kell and Duffy blood groups in the Thai people have led me to conclude that they migrated from the south, rather than from the north, to their present home." (Phansomboon ibid: 63). Unfortunately, Dr. Phansomboon did not receive the necessary support to do further study of the blood groups of the Thai in order to formulate a more complete hypothesis on the migrations of the Thai race to its present home and he did not continue his research. Most of the general public is not aware of this finding based on the blood groups of the Thai and no one cares to argue as to the sufficiency of considering the sole testimony of the blood groups. When laymen look for the proponent of this theory, they often wrongly quote Paul K. Benedict, as the source. Contrary to popular understanding, Benedict, though the number-one advocate of the theory of the affiliation between the Thai language and the Indonesian language,

[47]This view of Gedney, in an unpublished paper, was first circulated among his students at Michigan University and was quoted by Chamberlain in 1975.

never once talked about the Thai migration from the South, for the homeland of the Thai and the Indonesians in Benedict's view lies in the south of China at the place where we found the remnants of the Kadai languages. Thus, we read in Benedict's famous article of 1942 (reissued as Appendix I of his 1975 treatise on the subject of Austro-Thai), "The true Indonesian substratum on the Asiatic mainland is represented by four scattered languages in southern China, northern Tonkin, and Hainan, all of which constitute a single linguistic stock (Kadai)……and …… It is generally agreed that the Indonesian migrations have proceeded from the Asiatic mainland……(Benedict 1975: 438).

Dr. Phansomboon's idea that two or three thousand years ago, the stocks of people who were the ancestors of the present-day Thai left Indonesia, or more specifically Java, and migrated northward needs to be verified archaeologically. Historically this theory has no evidence for it; historical records as well as legends are mute concerning such ancestors. Up till now no archaeological report has come to light that lends support to such a theory. As has been said above, Bayard's archaeological findings are more congruent with placing speakers of the Tai languages in the coastal regions of south China and north Vietnam. (Bayard 1975: 75 cited in Terwiel 1979: 7). In regard to linguistic findings, this theory also finds no support. No trace of a Tai language has been found in Indonesia. The Tai language spoken in Malaysia is confined only to the four northern-most states adjacent to Thailand. And it is testimony to the recent migration from Thailand that there is almost no variation among the Tai languages in those four states; all of them resemble the language that is spoken in Takbai, Thailand.

5. The present-place homeland This is the theory that proposes that the Tai peoples have always lived in present-day Thailand. In fact, this theory is attractive to Thai patriots who prefer to think that the Thai have never suffered aggression from any other people and have always held their own on their present territory. But this view is incongruent with the historical and archaeological findings that propose an earlier settlement of the Mon people in the central part of Thailand (the Dvaravati Kingdom) and the Khmer influence in Lopburi and the eastern part of Thailand. Consequently, though this view is attractive to most Thai, no scholar has ventured it into writing until Dr. Sood Sangvichien wrote of it in Journal of the Siam Society in 1966.[48] Dr. Sangvichien, a medical doctor and anatomist, based his report on 37 prehistoric skeletons that he helped the Thai-Danish prehistoric expedition excavate from the Ban-Kao site in Kanchanaburi province during 1960-62. Dr. Sood compared those 37 neolithic skeletons with skeletons of present-day Thai people on several aspects, particularly on the artificial deformities of the teeth and on the alveolar prognatism and concluded in a guarded statement that we need to do more research in order to arrive at the conclusion that the present territory of Thailand has been home to ancient peoples who were not much different from the present-day Thai. Outside scholarly circles, this theory has been gaining momentum at present. There are suggestions such as (1) that the Dvaravati Kingdom had been a Thai kingdom all along (2) that a mysterious kingdom had existed on the site of Phimai, Nakorn Rajsema and that the inhabitants of this kingdom were ancestors of the present-day Thai and (3) that the skeletons from Ban Chieng, Udorn Thani (see supra page 66) resemble the skeletons of

[48] H.G. Quarich Wales, the English art historian, took back the view that he first expressed in 1937 in his later article of 1964.

present-day Thai people. It remains to be seen whether these suggestions will be supported by archaeological findings. Linguistically speaking, these suggestions are quite farfetched. Early steels excavated in the central part of Thailand have been found to be engraved upon in the ancient Mon language, or in Pali and Sanskrit or in the ancient Khmer language. Moreover, the Thai language spoken in the central part of Thailand is in conformity with the present-day Standard Thai language and does not present a picture of competing varieties of dialects which would be the case if it were the original place where the common Tai language had sprouted. So far, apart from Dr. Sood Sangvichien's writing, the proponents of the present-place homeland theory have been writing in a guarded way, using a pseudonym or phrasing their suggestion in the form of interrogatives or exclamatives. Only time will tell whether this theory should be put in the same waste-paper basket as should be put into another suggestion that the ancient ancestors of the Thai were the inhabitants of the Mohenjodaro culture in the Indus valley in India. This last suggestion, written under a pseudonym of course, does not have any follower so the present writer does not see fit to call it the 6th theory and thus it would waste more space.

Affiliation of the Tai language

Two taxonomic problems merit some consideration in connection with the Tai language family. Firstly, the nature of the affiliation of the Tai language family with the other language families in Southeast Asia. Secondly, classifications inside the Tai language family itself. The former of these problems had not been perceived as a problem until very recently.[49] Tonality and mono-syllabicity are the prominent two features that have attracted the attention of westerners to the Chinese language since the time of the first contact between East and West beginning with Marco Polo's journey. As research into the other languages of the Far East had been underdeveloped before the present century, westerners failed to recognize that tonality and monosyllabicity are two general features of other mainland Southeast Asia languages. Languages possessing these two features, however, do not necessarily belong to the Chinese (or to use the scholarly term: Sino-Tibetan) linguistic family. Since K. Wulff's trend-setting comparative study of Chinese and Tai (1934), an affiliation between Tai and Chinese has been assumed, if not taken for granted. Tai as well as Miao-Yao, and sometimes even Mon-Khmer, were grouped together with Tibeto-Burman, Karen and Chinese under the all-inclusive term-Indo-Chinese stock.[50] Some famous scholars such as H. Maspero have been noted to have studiously avoided making statement as to the affiliation of Tai to other language families such as Chinese or Indonesian, but nevertheless he compares Thai extensively with Chinese (for example see Maspero 1911: 164) and in his later work of 1952 juxtaposes

[49]Until 1942 when Paul K. Benedict published his crucial study entitled "Thai, Kadai and Indonesian: a New Alignment in Southeastern Asia"**, American Anthropologist**, n.s. 44, pp.576-601 in which Thai is to be related to Indonesian rather than to Chinese.

This is a gross overview of the history of Tai linguistic study. More detailed summary concerning Benedict's Austro-Thai hypothesis and the traditional views on Sino-Thai relationship is offered in Soren Egerod (1976).

[50]Terrien de Lacouperie (1887) could be noted as the one who propagated this enigmatic and ill-defined term.

the Tai languages right after the Tibeto-Burman languages and immediately before Chinese (though without explicit explanation in regard to the grouping into language families).

After Benedict's loud dissenting voice, linguists have been forced to face the issue, In reexamining the materials, one eventually looks more carefully into the list of lexical items purporting to show that Tai and Chinese have been using the same set of vocabularies for the same concepts, even for concepts that should be dated back to the earliest needs of the human species. The Great French comparativist, A.G. Haudricourt, showed that this was not the case at all. The traditional Chinese-Tai hypothesis rested for the most part on comparisons drawn from vocabularies susceptible to having been of cultural loans such as numbers (words for counting), military techniques (such as words for horse, saddle, elephant, yoke), and artisanal techniques (such as words for loom, paper, etc.), whereas Chinese-Tai affinity in the vocabularies of more basic areas such as words for body-parts and words in the field of agriculture is rare (Haudricourt 1948 later republished in 1972: 116).

The matter was further pursued when, in 1975, Benedict advanced his already controversial theory of Austro-Thai and posited Austro-Thai as a large phylum of languages comparable to a big umbrella sheltering the Malayo-Polynesian (or Austronesian) phylum as well as the Thai and Kadai languages (viz supra page 76). In other words, the Tai languages are regarded in this theory together with the Kadai languages as constituting a phylum (Tai-Kadai) standing in opposition to Austronesian. And both phylum (Tai-Kadai phylum and Austronesian phylum) have a distant relationship, forming a macro linguistic family called Austro-Thai. Austro-Thai is somewhat on the same taxonomic level as the Indo-European. For some ill-described reasons, Miao-Yao is also to be included in this super Austro-Thai stock. On the negative side, Austro-Thai must be kept distinct from all other linguistic stocks, particularly outside the Sino-Tibetan stock.

This Austro-Thai theory, though accepted by noted cultural anthropologists such as Ward H. Goodenough (1975), is so controversial that a special meeting was convened in Toronto in 1976 just to discuss this matter. More than 30 linguists who are experts on the languages of Southeast Asia attended this meeting and their contributions were published promptly in the same year under the editorship of M. Hashimoto; a fine symposium to which the present writer would like to send readers who are interested in the Austro-Thai theory. However, it should be noted with regret that matters are far from conclusive. The strongest voice against the Austro-Thai theory (thus the Thai-Indonesian affinity) at this 1976 meeting in Toronto is from W. Gedney. But Gedney did not vote against the Austro-Thai theory out of his belief in the Tai-Chinese relationship. Let me quote form J.F. Hartmann, a famous student of Gedney, "……he (Gedney) has studiously avoided extending the scope of his interest in historical Tai to speculation on wider affiliations of Tai to other language families such as Chinese or Indonesian. As he has commented publicly, "It is too soon to tell". To a scholar of his temperament and scientific outlook, a hypothesis without solid evidence to back it up is easily made but of questionable validity." (Hartmann 1986: 171-2). Thus, Gedney's is the mirror of the attitude of the earlier scholar. H. Maspero, who, when confronted with this very problem, state simply "On ne peut encore le dire" (H. Maspero 1934: 68).

On the pro side, after Haudricourt's 1948 rejection of the correspondences between Chinese and Tai (viz supra page 83) vocabularies, one should wait for firmer statement in favor of the Austro-Thai relationship from the 1976 Toronto meeting. But such was also not the case. Instead, Haudricourt pointed us to the obvious, but often unthinkable, fact that it is impossible to demonstrate that any two languages or any two language families, are not genetically related.[51] In other words, if we say we "know" that the Thai and English language are not genetically related, we are making use of our knowledge of history and geography and physical anthropology, etc., to come to the conclusion that it is most unlikely that the two groups of speakers who have been living apart of the two continents with no history of contacts until very recent times should possess languages that are genetically related. But what positive proof do we have to demonstrate that Thai and English could not possibly be genetically related? In fact, at present, one autodidact Norwegian linguist is trying to prove that Norwegian and Thai had come into contact at a very remote time in the past.[52]

Are we then to despair that we are trying it to know the unknowable, at least at the moment? Or, can anything go and historical-comparative linguistics be pointless and senseless? Not so, there is some sense in going by some points (assuming that the points guide us into some directions). The direction of megalo-linguistics: the attempt to group together into larger and larger units of languages families finally constituting as super language family would make some sense if one subscribes to the theory that originally, such as during the time of Adam and Eve, there had been only one language in the world. Failing that, megalo-linguistics would make some sense also if one aims to use evidence gained from linguistics to enliven some pre-historic scenario reconstructed from archaeological findings. Thus, the practitioners of megalo-linguistics, spreading the Sino-Tibetan umbrella, with the Tai language family as a younger sister language sharing the shadow, might be intentionally or unintentionally endorsing the pre-historic scenario of southern China, such as the one described by Kwang-Chih Chang, as the "Chinese interaction sphere". (Chang 1981: 154 cited by Solheim II 1984: 17-8). That is that south China is to be regarded as a partner with north China in the ancestry of Chinese civilization and that in the process it lost its original identity and became Chinese virtually from the beginning. In other words, south China in pre-historic time was not less Chinese than north China, granted that all the inhabitants of south-China shared Chinese-like languages.

The other direction pointed to by another version of megalo-linguistics that groups together the Tai language family and the Austronesian (popular term: Indonesian) language family would be, again intentionally or unintentionally, the endorsement of the pre-historic scenario of southern China such as the one favored by Wilhelm G. Solheim II (1984). In this view, South China is to be significantly distinguished from North China, culturally and ethnologically, and any area of present-day China should not be called

[51]To quote Haudricourt verbatim we have, "Nous sommes réunis pour discuter l'apparentement des familles ou groupes de languages d'Asie orientale et méridionale et d'Océanie. Plus exactement nous allons discuter du degree d'apparentement relative car à mon sens il est impossible de démontrer que deux langues ou deux familles ne sont pas apparentées." (Haudricourt 1976: 87).

[52]Arne Ostmoe **A Germanic Ingrafting in thai** (in press, to be expected in 1990).

Chinese before the Han Dynasty (Solheim II 1984: 18). In fact, Solheim II has always conceived South China to be a part of Southeast Asia. This view also agrees with the findings of another archaeologist, Richard Pearson, who noted that "Thai-Malay Neolithic sites share a number of common vessel forms with recently described sites from South China, which diverge rather significantly from North Chinese Neolithic sites (Pearson 1982: 83 cited in Solheim II 1984: 18).

In the writer's opinion, both directions of megalo-linguistic practice (and the amount of reading one has to do in the process) are useful. They give us more understanding about the Tai people as well as the neighboring people in the south of China in pre-historic time. Careful gleaning of lists after lists[53]of lexical correspondences of Tai and Chinese on one hand and of Tai and Austronesian languages on the other hand gives us insights into the nature of the contacts the Tai people had with other peoples in pre-historic time.

However, strictly linguistically speaking, we are far from being able to choose under which large linguistic umbrella the Tai language family should be placed. Among a number of lexical items suggested as related to Chinese, how are we to distinguish cognates (evidence of genetically related relationship) from loans? The problem of proving each word to be a Chinese loan to Tai or Tai loans to Chinese, or common borrowing form a third language is a difficult one. Also it is a difficult problem how to establish the vocabulary of a proto-language. Fang Kuei Li, the man who has done so much on comparative Tai linguistics, describes the difficulty in this way:

"The vocabulary of a proto-language may be established by selecting those words which are wide spread in the different languages and dialects. By using this method we may be fairly certain that these words existed in the proto-language. Nevertheless it is quite possible that some items may spread through a wide area in fairly recent times without being in the proto-language, and some isolated forms in one or two obscure dialects may be old relics. Furthermore items that can be thus established to have existed in the proto-language may still be loans form one source to another, but we know so little about the character and sources of a proto-vocabulary that we have to leave these problems open". (Li 1976: 39). So difficult is the task to prove the Sino-Tai relationship that Fang Kuei Li merely offers some set of correspondences to show the Sino-Tai relationship. But before doing that he cautions, "This is not to deny the eventual genetic relationship of Tai with other family of languages, such as Austronesian or Austroasiatic, but rather to offer some material for the consideration of Sino-Tai relationship". (Li 1976: ibid)

The problem of the linguistic affiliations of the Tai language family is at present the question of choice based on personal inclination and one's methodology in working (whether one chooses to be more lenient in scrutinizing the Tai-Chinese correspondences or the Tai-Austronesian correspondences). Risking the bad name of an isolationist, the present writer prefers not to place the Tai language family under any

[53] So far, Manomaivibool's (1975) dissertation entitled, **"A Study of Sino-Thai lexical correspondences"**, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, gives the most impressive (about 620) list of Standard Thai words that appear to be related in some way to Chinese. On the Tai Austronesian side, one must always refer to Benedict's (1975) **Austro-Thai** (cited).

mega-size umbrella. The language families of Southeast Asia as given in my recent text book (Ratanakul, 1988) number five as the following:

1. The Tai language family
2. The Sino-Tibetan language family
3. The Austroasiatic language family
4. The Austronesian language family
5. The Miao-Yao language family

More convinced by Solheim II's version of the scenario in South China, before the historical time in which South China was to be regarded as a distinct territory from North China, my personal inclination leads me toward the pan Austro-Thai cultural zone. Southern cultural complex chains as enumerated in Eberhard's **The local cultures of South and East China** (1943, 1968) also point in the same direction. Nevertheless, in judging a linguistic issue, linguistic evidence is preferred over evidences gathered from other sciences. Apart from having to choose between two almost equally welcoming umbrellas, owing to the intricate convergence of cultures in South China, the third choice is linguistically congruous. The sciences of linguistics today have opened another theoretical window. We are not compelled to think only of genetic relationships and family-trees. Typological comparison is another working model that is worth exploring. India has been shown by M.B. Emeneau (1956) to be a fine example of a linguistic area. Southeast Asia has been another introduced as linguistic area through the examination of tonogenesis across several linguistic families in the area (Haudricourt 1961 and Matisoff 1973). All in all, considering both phonological and syntactic factors, about 10 linguistic features have been attested as abundantly specific to the Southeast Asia linguistic area (Budge 1980, Ratanakul 1988: 11). Of these, 3 features (namely 1. the use of numeral classifiers; 2. the use of sentence-final particles; and 3. tonogenesis in compensation to the change somewhere in the syllable (initial and final consonant as well as the vowel) can be shown to have their density of occurrence in the Tai language family. It is thus linguistically advantageous to regard the Tai language family as a distinct language family which interacts with, influences as well as is influenced by, other language families. The premature juxtaposing of the Tai language family to other language families in the time-frame considered is unjustifiable through linguistic evidence[54] and needs to be relegated to a sport of the past.

Divisions within the Tai language family

In contrast to the first taxonomic problem, the divisions within the Tai language family itself do not present much of a problem. Fang Kuei Li, in his pioneering articles of 1959 and 1960 which are accepted by many, used vocabulary as well as phonological features as criterion to demonstrate that the Tai language family had branched out in three directions:

1. The Northern Tai group has languages spoken in the south of China such as the Wu-ming, Chienchung, Tse-heng, Ling-yan, His-lin, Tien-chow and Po-ai languages.

[54]Such as the time-frame of 100,000 years speculated for the Eurasial language (Shafer 1963).

Some northern Tai languages have been found to be displaced farther south such as the Sek language, spoken in Laos and in the northeast of Thailand.

2. The Central Tai group has languages spoken in the south of china and the north of Vietnam such as the Tay, Tho, Nung, Lungchow, Tien-pao and the Yung-chun languages.

3. The Southwestern Tai group has languages spoken in Assam (India), Burma, Thailand and Laos as well as some languages in Vietnam such as the White Tai and the Black Tai. The Tai languages spoken in Malaysia also belong to the Southwestern Tai group.

Some scholars, however, do not see much difference between the Central Tai group and the Southwestern Tai group. Haudricourt called these two groups by the same name: "Thai conquerants". In my article of 1985, the question of the validity of separating the Central Tai group from the Southwestern group was raised. Chamberlain in 1975 cited an unpublished work by Gedney which expressed the opinion that the Central and Southwestern languages of Li form only one branch. The lack of data concerning the Tai languages spoken roughly in the expanse between the Red River and Cao Bang in North Vietnam has made the question of the unification of Central Tai and Southwestern Tai an open one.

General Characteristics of the Tai languages

As of now, no one has formed a complete picture of Proto-Tai, the ancestral language of all the present-day Tai languages, so the general characteristics of Proto-Tai cannot be presented. Those of the Tai languages in this section are characteristics that are commonly found in almost all the Tai languages of today. However, it would not be too far-fetched to speculate that ancestral Proto-Tai would not be too diverse from its descendant-languages and that, were it to be reconstructed, it would share some of the following characteristics.

a. Monosyllabicity Cognates of proper Tai words in present-day Tai languages are found to be monosyllabic words. J. Marvin Brown (1965 and 1985: 215-221) listed 1387 and 818 words that he believed to have been present in ancient Thai. Most of these words are monosyllabic.

In maintaining that monosyllabicity is one of the chief characteristics of the Tai language, the present writer's opinion that the Tai language family is to be separated from the Austronesian language family is emphasized. If we were to place Tai and Austronesian under the same umbrella, as stipulated by Paul Benedict (see supra), we would have to hold that many Tai words (or roots to use Benedict's term) come in disyllabic form.

b. Tonality At present there has not been a single report of a Tai language that does not have tones. Most Tai languages of today have 5 or 6 tones; some languages in the south of Thailand have 7 tones. And it is a common characteristic of all Tai languages that syllables that end with nasal consonants and long vowels can have more tones than syllables with final stop consonants.

c. Devoid of Morphology The Tai languages can be viewed as real monosyllable-isolating languages in that they do not make use of the process of derivation at all. Prefix, suffix and infix have no place in Tai grammar. A few prefixes and suffixes that are borrowed from Pali and Sanskrit are used only with loan words from those languages. If some Pali prefixes and suffixes are used with proper Tai words, this is generally regarded as incorrect or as the user's wish to create a special effect (such as a joke or sarcasm). The fact that the Tai languages lack the process of derivation places the Tai language family outside the Sino-Tibetan language family. Sino-Tibetan languages have traces of ancient prefixes and suffixes. The fact that the Tai languages do not make use of infix (except in Khmer loan words) places Tai also outside the Austroasiatic language family.

d. Simple syntax Since the Tai languages do not make use of the morphological process, their most important syntactic device is positioning. The three simple syntactic rules are : 1) in the noun phrase Modified + Modifier (shirt + red, not red shirt), 2) in the verb phrase also Modified + Modifier (run + fast, not fast run), and 3) in the sentence, the syntactic positioning is Subject + Verb + Object. This last rule puts the Tai languages far apart from the Tibeto-Burman (in the Sino-Tibetan language family) in that in Tibeto-Burman the syntactic rule is Subject + Object + Verb.

e. Numeral Classifier Some Westerners say jokingly that Tai speaking people cannot count without mentioning the numeral classifier. This joke is due to the fact that in Thai numeral classifiers abound. Some linguists such as R.B. Jones (1970) suggest that the numeral classifier might have originated in the Tai language family, from whence it was spread to other language families of Southeast Asia that had come into contact with the Tai language family. It is speculated that during the first step in its evolution, the numeral classifier was conceived as another noun or another verb that was juxtaposed after the numerals in a noun phrase. This serves to individuate or to bring sharper meaning to the noun that is being counted or pointed to. Numeral classifiers help to entities and describe qualities such as the shape or the texture of the head noun (the noun that is being counted or pointed to).

As there is no such class of numeral classifiers in English, it is difficult to describe a numeral classifier to an English speaking audience. Loosely speaking, in the English use of 'a cake of soap' or 'a hand of bananas', 'cake' and 'hand' come close to the usage of Thai numeral classifiers. Numeral classifiers are, however, an important feature of many other languages, regardless of their affinity with the Tai language family. For example, in Chinese, Vietnamese and Hopi (all of them outside the Tai language family) numeral classifiers exist. Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family, Vietnamese belongs to the Austroasiatic language family and Hopi is an American Indian language. Numeral classifiers are used in these languages to describe the shape, size, color, movability, animacy, status, etc. of the head noun. In all the Tai languages that have been described, numeral classifiers abound and their presence can be considered an important characteristic of the noun phrase in the Tai language family.

f. Verb serialization Verb serialization or, to use another name, verb concatenation is another characteristic that is found in many language families in Southeast Asia. We do not know whether it was originated in the Tai language family or not, but it is an

important characteristic of the verb phrase within it and is found to be common to every Tai language that has been described thus far. I consider it as one of the common Tai characteristics.

David Filbeck (1975: 112) gave a definition of the phenomenon of verb serialization as "a string of verbs occurring in sequence or serially within a clause". Verb serialization in Thai is the occurrence of two or more verbs in sequence. As this kind of verb phrase construction in almost unthinkable in English, examples of the use of verb serialization in Thai are given below:

(1) dèk kin khâaw — a sentence with one verb-without verb serialization

Noun (Subject)	Verb	Noun (Object)
child	eat	rice

'The child ate rice'.

(2) dèk pay kin khâaw — a sentence with a series of two verbs

Noun (Subject)	Verb	Verb	Noun (Object)
child	go	eat	rice

'The child went to eat rice'.

(3) dèk klàp pay kin khâaw — a sentence with a series of three verbs

Noun (Subject)	Verb	Verb	Verb	Noun (Object)
child	return	go	eat	rice

'The child returned (to go) to eat rice'.

(4) dèk dəən klàp pay kin khâaw — a sentence with a series of four verbs

Noun (Subject)	Verb	Verb	Verb	Verb	Noun (Object)
child	walk	return	go	eat	rice

'The child returned walking to eat rice'.

(5) dèk chɔ̂ɔp dəən klàp pay kin khâw — a sentence with a series of five verb

Noun (Subject)	Verb	Verb	Verb	Verb	Verb	Noun (Object)
child	like	walk	return	go	eat	rice

'The child like to return walking to eat rice'
etc.

David Filbeck (1975: 118) gave an ingenious example of a sentence having 12 verbs in a series (at least in its surface form). In actual usage, such a feat is rare. But a series of 4-5 verbs is common in present-day Thai.

David Filbeck (1975: 113) also mentioned that verb serialization needs not be confined to sequences of verbs alone. Oftentimes there is a mixture of transitive and intransitive verbs, along with objects and locational nouns, occurring in a series. Another tour de force example was heard by the present writer in an actual conversation :

(6)	khâw	tâŋcay	dəən	pay	càt	hăa	sűü
	Pronoun	Verb	Verb	Verb	Verb	Verb	Verb
	He	intend	walk	go	arrange	search	buy

maa	kèp	wáy	cháy	hây	sanùk
Verb	Verb	Verb	Verb	Verb	Verb
come	keep	to put in place	use	causative verb	having fun

'He intended to go searching for (that item) in order to keep (it) for usage that will bring enjoyment (to him)'.

As verb serialization has no place (except two-verb sentences) in English, it can readily be seen that the English rendering of this example is a somersault feat of translation. Such examples are, however, rare but a sentence with 3-4 verbs is quite common in present-day Tai languages.

g. Final particles This phenomenon of having final particles has attracted almost no attention from linguists as well as laymen until very recently. However, Tai speakers use them extensively to indicate significant grammatical functions. The reason for this lack of concern about final particles may be due to the fact that most of the final particles occur in spoken language more than in the written form. The other reason for lack of concern may be that there is no literal meaning or translation of any kind for these final particles. Final particles cannot be categorized as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs or any other categorization in classical grammar. To give an idea about final particles to an English speaking audience, examples are necessary. The following examples are from an actual conversation between husband and wife:

husband-	nɔ́ɔŋ[55]	yàa	pay	sűü	maa	?ìik	<u>ná</u>?
	younger sister	don't	go	buy	come	again	final particle

[55]It is quite common in Thai that husband and wife call each other elder brother (wife to husband) and younger sister (husband to wife).

'You don't buy this thing again'

wife-	thammay	lâ?	khá?
	why	final particle	final particle

'Why? (with politeness final particle)'

husband-	man	mây	dii	rɔ̀ɔk
	It	negative particle	good	final particle

'It is not quite good'. (with final particle of diminution)

wife-	kɔ̂ɔ	sɯ́ü	maa	lɛ́ɛw	nîa?
	particle	buy	come	particle showing past tense	final particle

'But I've already bought it'.

husband-	?aw	pay	thíŋ	sá?
	take	go	abandon	final particle

'You can throw it away'.

Final particles (underlined for quick identification) in the conversation above have no direct translation into English. One may be able to understand almost all the information and translate the above examples into acceptable English without most of these final particles; however, their presence is very important to Tai speakers who want to have a smooth, clear and polite conversation. All the underlined words are what linguists call final particles, and their major function is to reveal the speaker's attitude, mood, emotion, the desire to be polite, the desire to diminish conflict, the desire to make amends, etc. Final particles sometimes identify the relationship between the speaker and the addressee (s). In the case that there is one speaker but more than one addressee of unequal status, it is the final particles that help identify to which addressee the speaker wishes to direct each of his statements. Patcharin Peyasantiwong (1981: 3) saw the final particles in this way. "They function as a major part of the meta-language of Thai and are generally the most puzzling phenomenon for the non-native student of the language".

The use of final particles can also identify the speaker as coming from which part of Thailand as most final particles are dialect-specific. For example, women from the Northern part of Thailand end their sentences with the final particle "cáw". Speakers from the Northeast part of Thailand prefer to end their sentences with the final particle "dəə". Some final particles are appended to the name of the dialect to show that the speakers of that dialect prefer to end their sentences with that final particle; for example, speakers of

the Tai-?ɔ̂ɔ dialect end their sentences with the final particle ?ɔ̂ɔ. Final particles are found in all dialects of the Tai language family, hence their presence is noted here as one other common characteristic to be found over-all in this group.

A brief sketch of evolution of the Thai language

All Tai languages (except for Ahom which is now extinct) have been open to outside influences and each has evolved. Limited of space, this paper shall give only a sketch of the evolution of the Standard Thai language which is the official language of Thailand.

There are two facets to be considered when looking at the evolution of any language. Are we to describe the evolution of the written language or the spoken language? The present writer prefers to describe the evolution of the oral Thai language. However, we have to refer to the written one because, prior to the invention of the tape-recorder, we only know the language of the past through its representation in written form such as in the inscriptions, old documents and the language of old literary works. Early Thai writings in the inscriptions of the Sukhodaya period (the 13th century) give evidence that the Thai language was not developing in a vacuum. Already in the 13th century, there are more words present than the words that linguists (such as Haudricourt 1948; Brown 1965 and 1985) cite in reconstructing the common Proto-Tai language. Already in the inscription of Rama Khamhaeng in 1293 A.D., there are loan words from several sources such as Pali, Sanskrit, Khmer and even a few words from the Persian language.

The reason behind all these borrowings is that the common Proto-Tai language lacked words in some semantic fields. There was a need for new words, for instance, when the Thai people of the Sukhodaya period experienced the enrichment of their lives brought about by their contact with a new religion (Buddhism). Their adoptions of this religion was concomitant with their acceptance of words from the Pali and Sanskrit languages which then served to broaden Thai conceptuality. For example, the word **bun** brought to them over the concept of having good merit and the word **bàap** the concept of possessing bad merit.

Khmer or Cambodian is another language that influenced and was influenced by the Thai language. The Thai people came into contact with the Khmer speaking people when the Thai moved down the valley of the Chao Phya river and spread out over the territory of present-day Thailand. This territory had been within the Khmer sphere of influence prior to the 13th century. The defeats that the Thai inflicted on the Khmer people in the 14th and 15th centuries also served to bring closer the two peoples. As a result, the Thai (the victors) adopted much of the vocabulary of the defeated (the Khmer), especially in the semantic field of government including the special vocabulary for royalty. The picture of the King in the old proto-Tai society, as is described in the inscription of King Rama Khamhaeng (1293 A.D.), was that of the father of his people, and there was no special royal vocabulary in these older times. However, when the Thai defeated the Khmer, the Khmer idea of kingship as a God-King was adopted, and Khmer as well as Pali-Sanskrit words were utilized in the Thai court to address the King and royalty. The readers who want an in depth study of Pali-Sanskrit loan words in Thai are kindly requested to refer to Professor William J. Gedney's dissertation, entitled "Indic loanwords in spoken Thai" (1947); those who are interested in the Khmer loanwords in Thai can refer to Professor Karnchana Nacsakul's dissertation, entitled "Parallelism in the use and

constructions of certain grammatical and lexical items in Cambodian and Thai: a typological comparative study". (1972)

Later in the Ayuddhaya period, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Thai came into contact with European nations such as the Portugese and the French. It was inevitable that loan words from Portugese and French crept into the Thai language as well. Things that had not been in use in Thai society prior to western influence lacked words to designate them in Thai. Therefore, the Portugese and French loans were adopted. The word for 'soap' came from the Portugese 'sapu'. Words such as 'pang' meaning 'bread' came from the French 'pain'. 'kaaramɛɛ' meaning 'a kind of sweetmeat' came form the French 'caramel', and 'farang' meaning 'westerner' came from the French 'français'.

From the 18th century until the present-day, the Thai people have experienced another influence. The British and the Americans, the two of them: English-speaking peoples, came into Thailand through the widening factor of commerce in the modern world. Countless words from English have been adopted into the Thai language at present and it is certain that many more will come as we continue to experience the globalization of this earth through the new ways of communication such as that of televised news by satellites, for example.

Chinese is another language that helped to broaden the vocabulary of the Thai. Chinese loan words in Thai come form at least two periods. Early loans that were adopted during the proto-Tai period when the ancestors of the Tai-speaking people resided on the southern coast of China are difficult to distinguish from real Tai words. These are different from later loans that were adopted in the late Ayuddhaya and Ratanakosin period (beginning in the 18th century). Late loans such as the words for 'noodle' (in Thai kŭay-tĭaw and kŭay-cáp) are quite easy to be distinguished from real Thai words because of their use of the rising tone and high tone, respectively, which in the Thai writing system make use of the special diacritic called mái trii (ไม้ตรี) and mái cattawaa (ไม้จัตวา). These are not frequently much used in real Thai words.

The above treatment is only the briefest review of the evolution of the Thai language. An evolution of a language is not confined only to the adoption of foreign terms as loan words. There is as well the evolution of the phonological system and of the syntax. However, the non-technical nature of this brief overview of the Thai language makes a survey of the evolution of the phonological system as well as the syntactic system not feasible. One last question remains, however, to be answered, namely, what is the attitude of the Thai people viz à viz this evolution?

In Thai society, as well as in other societies, there are at least two camps of people: the conservatives and the liberals. The conservatives deplore the fact that something has to change and try to slow the process of changing. The liberals do not mind such change and some even like evolutionary process that helps to make the Thai language a more fitting intellectual tool for people in the contemporary world. Generally, it can be said that the Thai people (except for teachers of the Thai language and literature) are not very conscious about their language. Many do not distinguish loans from real Thai words. Their attitude is "I don't mind and I don't care as long as these words are in the Thai language so that I may use them." Can this be envisaged as a threat to the well-being of the Thai language? The writer does not see this as threatening. At present Thai is

accepted unquestionably as the language of the nation, and the many standardizing factors that exist in Thai society (such as the mass media, the Thai Royal Academy, the teaching of Thai in schools throughout the nation and official dictionaries) are adequate to ensure a salutary evolution of the Thai language.

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